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PRABUDDHA BHARATA

or AWAKENED INDIA

A monthly journal of the Ramakrishna Order
started by Swami Vivekananda in 1896



June 2012

Vol. 117, No. 6



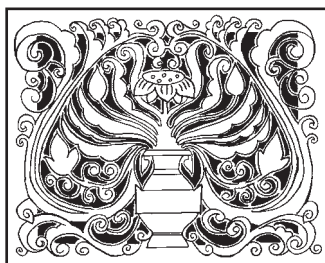
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Vol. 117, No. 6
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Contents



Amrita Kalasha

EDITORIAL OFFICE

Prabuddha Bharata
Advaita Ashrama
PO Mayavati, Via Lohaghat
Dt Champawat · 262 524
Uttarakhand, India
E-mail: prabuddhabharata@gmail.com
pb@advaitaashrama.org

PUBLICATION OFFICE

Advaita Ashrama
5 Dehi Entally Road
Kolkata · 700 014
Tel: 91 · 33 · 2264 0898 / 2264 4000
2286 6450 / 2286 6483
E-mail: mail@advaitaashrama.org

INTERNET EDITION AT:

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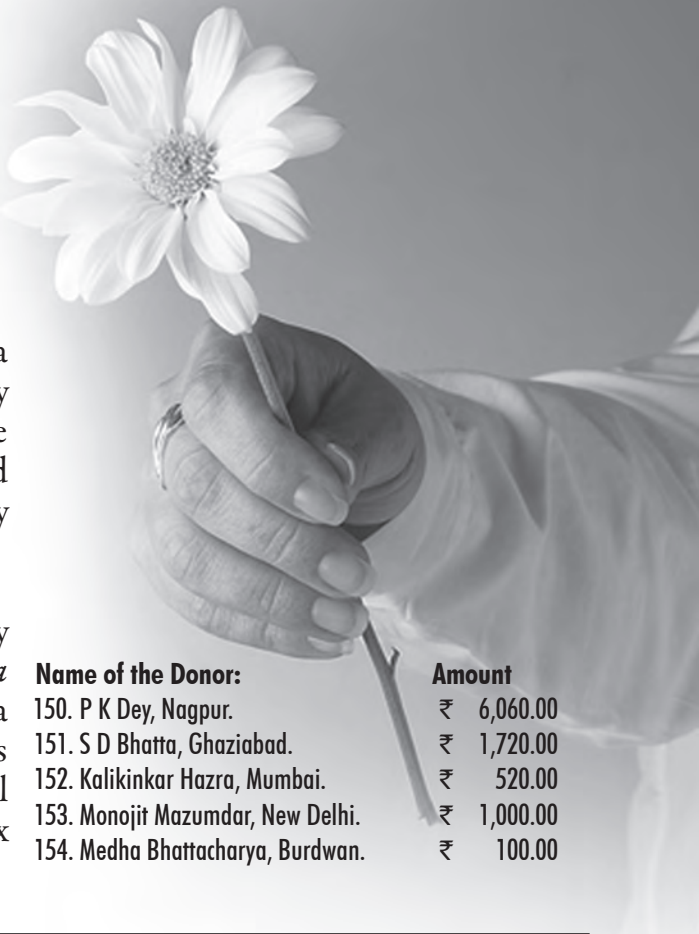
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Light of the Divine

June 2012
Vol. 117, No. 6

अजीर्यताममृतानामुपेत्य जीर्यन्मर्त्यः क्वधःस्थः प्रजानन् ।
अभिध्यायन् वर्णरतिप्रमोदानतिदीर्घे जीविते को रमेत ॥

Having reached the proximity of the undecaying immortals, what decaying mortal, who dwells on this lower region, the earth, but knows of higher goals, will take delight in a long life while conscious of the worthlessness of music, disport, and the joy thereof?

(*Katha Upanishad*, 1.1.28)

अस्तमित आदित्ये याज्ञवल्क्य चन्द्रमस्यस्तमिते शान्तेऽग्नौ शान्तायां वाचि
किञ्ज्योतिरेवायं पुरुष इति आत्मैवास्य ज्योतिर्भवतीति आत्मनैवायं ज्योतिषास्ते
पत्ययते कर्म कुरुते विपत्येतीति ॥

[King Janaka asked:] When the sun and the moon have both set, the fire has gone out, and speech has stopped, Yajnavalkya, what exactly serves as light for a man? The Atman serves as his light. It is through the light of the Atman that he sits, goes out, works, and returns.

(*Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, 4.3.6)

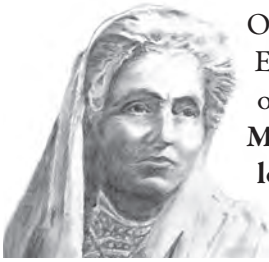
आदित्यप्रत्यस्तस्य रेतसः ज्योतिः पश्यन्ति वासरम् । परो यदिध्यते दिवि ॥
उद्वयं तमसस्परि ज्योतिः पश्यन्त उत्तरंऽस्वः पश्यन्त उत्तरं देवं देवत्रा सूर्यमगन्म
ज्योतिरुत्तममिति ज्योतिरुत्तममिति ॥

In the supreme Brahman, which is the oldest and the source of the world, they [the knowers of Brahman] visualize everywhere that supreme Light that shines like the all-pervading daylight. Having realized the Light, which is the dispeller of ignorance, which is non-different from the Light within our hearts, having visualized the Light that is higher than other lights, we have attained the Sun, the Light that is the best of all lights, bright among the lights.

(*Chhandogya Upanishad*, 3.17.7-8)

THIS MONTH

Humankind is enveloped in a kind of internal and external darkness and seeks to escape from it by following the divine light within, which confers **Knowledge beyond Darkness**.



One of Swami Vivekananda's English disciples was the wife of Captain Sevier. **Mother of Mayavati: The Story of Charlotte Sevier – I** captures her spirit and dedication in implementing Swamiji's dream

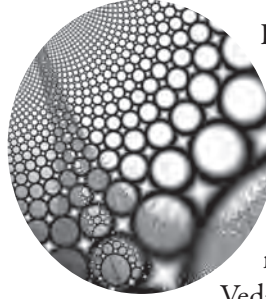
in India. The article is the first chapter of the forthcoming book by Dr Amrita M Salm, a long time devotee from Santa Barbara.

The Visible Flame of Kali by Sudesh Garg of Ambala beautifully describes Sri Ramakrishna as the flame of the Divine Mother, which is drawing us from the darkness of ignorance.



God transcends all human conceptions, yet we try to conceptualize him in order to approach him. Umesh Gulati, a devotee from the nascent Ramakrishna Vedanta Society of North Carolina, US, writes about the **Nature and Conceptions of God**.

When two music maestros meet the effects are sublime and extraordinary. This was the case with Swami Vivekananda and Bhairavi Kempegowda, as described by Brahmachari Suvimalachaitanya of Ramakrishna Ashrama, RIMSE, Mysore, in **Meeting of Two Great Musicians**.



Research scholar Rajeshwar Mukhopadhyaya of Birbhum, West Bengal, shows in **Cyclic Cosmology and Vedanta** how the latest theories in cosmology are approximating Vedantic concepts of creation.

Swamiji's clarion call roused Indians to uplift the neglected masses of the nation. He is today an icon of social and moral regeneration. Dr C M Bisha, lecturer at PRMHSS, Kannur, writes on **Swami Vivekananda: Icon of Social Regeneration**.

In the seventh part of **Vivekananda and His Seafaring Vessels** Somnath Mukherjee, Researcher, Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Kolkata, describes Swamiji's voyage from Glasgow to New York on the *SS Numidian*.



The fourth instalment of **Svarajya Siddhi: Attaining Self-dominion** by Gangadarendra Saraswati (18th cent.), fifteenth pontiff of Kanchi Kamakoti Pitham, Kanchipuram, speaks of the different types of sannyasa, and why this stage is important for the attainment of the highest knowledge. The original Sanskrit text is translated and annotated by Swami Narasimhananda of Advaita Ashrama, Kolkata.

Light beyond Darkness

FOR THOUSANDS OF YEARS humankind was held under a kind of spell. The beguilement, like a bad piece of music starting well, commenced with entrancement and euphoria, but slowly turned into disenchantment, and is now nightmarish. This spell presents a worm's-eye view of a chaotic world that is conjured up by the magic of the senses. Humans were trapped in believing the mental misrepresentation of the world created by the senses and began feeling insignificant and infinitesimal. However, the senses underestimated human potential for snapping out of this trance, and today humankind is running free of the old trammels of superstitions, dogmas, and lies circulated as sensory knowledge. The present age is therefore a harbinger of great development, and humans are reaching beyond the senses to a whole new world view. The change of perspective is stupendous: the vast universe is beginning to be understood as a mere drop in the vaster and almost infinite ocean of existence.

Many theories have been put forward to explain the mystery of the universe—its origins, continuance, and dissolution. One theory that has gripped popular imagination is the Big Bang; another is the standard inflationary model. Some cosmologists say the universe is cyclic in nature, a few others declare there are many universes, a distinct group swears by parallel universes, an additional class says there are hidden dimensions in the universe. These theories milling around for sometime have pushed ideas of creation such as design and plan to the background. Till a few

years ago such startling theories would have been scientific anathema and subject to ridicule. Today they are accepted as mainstream cosmological theories.

Vedanta speaks of the universe as undergoing 'cyclic rest and change', eternally. Swami Vivekananda, in his lecture 'Cosmology', speaks of the Vedantic view of a cyclic universe: 'All motion, everything in this universe can be likened to waves undergoing successive rise and fall. Some of these [Indian] philosophers hold that the whole universe quiets down for a period. Others hold that this quieting down applies only to systems; that is to say, that while our system here, this solar system, will quiet down and go back into the undifferentiated state, millions of others systems will go the other way, and will project outwards. I should rather favour the second opinion, that this quieting down is not simultaneous over the whole of the universe, and that in different parts different things go on. But the principle remains the same, that all we see—that is nature herself—is progressing in successive rises and falls.'

Why do humans need to know the nature of the universe? Does it matter? It does. As knowledge of the world becomes refined, so do human conceptions of God, and this knowledge enhances and redefines our relationship with the Godhead. What we are depends on the sum total of our thoughts, and so does our view of the world and God. Thanks to science today we know that the totality of matter in various forms constitutes only about five per cent of the whole;

the other ninety-five per cent of the universe is made of unknown dark matter and dark energy. It is dark energy and dark matter that has created the universe, is sustaining it, and will finally destroy it. Like a minuscule quantity of foam and bubbles on the surface of the ocean, visible matter exists on the vast sea of darkness. The foam and bubbles and froth are completely at the mercy of the unfathomable waters.

What is the nature of this darkness? We call it dark because we do not know clearly its properties. Do the words dark energy and dark matter ring a bell? Does it speak of the *shunya*, void, of the Buddhists, that carries and permeates all phenomena and makes their development possible? When Sri Ramakrishna in an ecstatic state touched Swamiji, the latter said: '[I] saw that the walls, and everything in the room, whirled rapidly and vanished into naught, and the whole universe together with my individuality was about to merge in an all-encompassing mysterious void.' The black void teems with possibilities and is conceptualized in India as Kali the Divine Mother, depicted as dark, who creates, preserves, and destroys the universe. Sri Ramakrishna says: 'Is Kali, my Divine Mother, of a black complexion? She appears black because She is viewed from a distance; but when intimately known She is no longer so. The sky appears blue at a distance; but look at it close by and you will find that it has no colour. The water of the ocean looks blue at a distance but when you go near and take it in your hand, you find that it is colourless.' Right now, as we are reading, dark energy is inflating, tearing up the universe and sending it to no one knows where. During his visit to Kashmir, Swamiji had a cosmic vision of the Divine Mother as Kali. His biography narrates the incident: 'One evening ... it came. He had centred "his whole attention on the dark, the painful, and the inscrutable in the world, with

the determination to reach, by this particular road, the One behind phenomena"—for such was his conception of the Mother. Outside all was stillness; but within him a world-destroying tempest raged. In the exaltation of his vision he wrote "Kali the Mother", one of his best-known poems. In it a glimpse of his vision of the tumult of the universe is given, pictured as the mad joy of the Mother's Dance. Filled with the sublime experience, he wrote the last word; the pen fell from his hand; and he dropped to the floor, losing consciousness, while his soul soared into Bhava-samadhi. The man who had swayed thousands in the West, who had roused the consciousness of India, lay as if dead, in a swoon of ecstasy and awe.'

'Kali the Mother', like dark energy and dark matter, is unknown but not unknowable. She reveals her nature so that she can be approached. Sri Ramakrishna says: 'Brahman alone is addressed as the Mother. This is because a mother is an object of great love. One is able to realize God just through love.' Further, Sri Ramakrishna directs our gaze towards this reality through a song: 'Is Kali, my Mother, really dark? / The Naked One, of blackest hue, / Lights the Lotus of the Heart.' The unknown power, undetected by the senses, is the knowable reality established deep in human hearts revealing itself as a divine flame. This divine flame embodied in this age as Sri Ramakrishna. The avatara of the age is breaking the spell of the senses through divine songs: 'Kali-Kali-Kali'. The thrilling and happy crescendo of the music is dispelling the darkness of ignorance and leading humankind to the supreme light. The Bhagavadgita states: 'It is the Light even of the lights; It is said to be beyond darkness. It is Knowledge, the Knowable, and [that which is] attained through Knowledge. It exists in a special way in the hearts of all.'





Mother of Mayavati: The Story of Charlotte Sevier – I

Dr Amrita M Salm

ART BY SUBHANKAR BHATTACHARYA

CHARLOTTE WAS SITTING hunched over in her chair, musing, while her niece's two dogs and a cat affectionately watched her. As she pulled the Kashmiri shawl closer to her chest to warm herself from the London chill, she observed the calendar and saw the large numbers indicating 1927. Although her vision was weak, her memories, especially of the early days, were vivid. Charlotte was doing what she frequently

did: remembering those days in 1896 when she first heard about Vedanta philosophy, the ancient yet eternally modern Indian religion, which would become her passion and her purpose. She recalled her first private interview with Swami Vivekananda, the monk who introduced her to Vedanta. He addressed her as 'mother' and then asked her: 'Would you not like to come to India? I will give you of my best realizations.'¹

She reflected again on those words and realized that at that time she had no conception of the force behind them. When she heard him speak, she knew she was hearing the Truth. Charlotte felt more than just a resonance with the teachings. A forceful revolution was taking place within her when she thought about these principles. He had said: 'This little separate self must die. Then we shall find that we are in the Real, and that Reality is God, and He is our own true nature, and He is always in us and with us. Let us live in Him and stand in Him. It is the only joyful state of existence. Life on the plane of the Spirit is the only life, and let us all try to attain to this realisation.'²

For years she had been looking for answers to life's perennial questions: What is the purpose of my existence? How can I know the Eternal? When and how will I experience inner peace?³

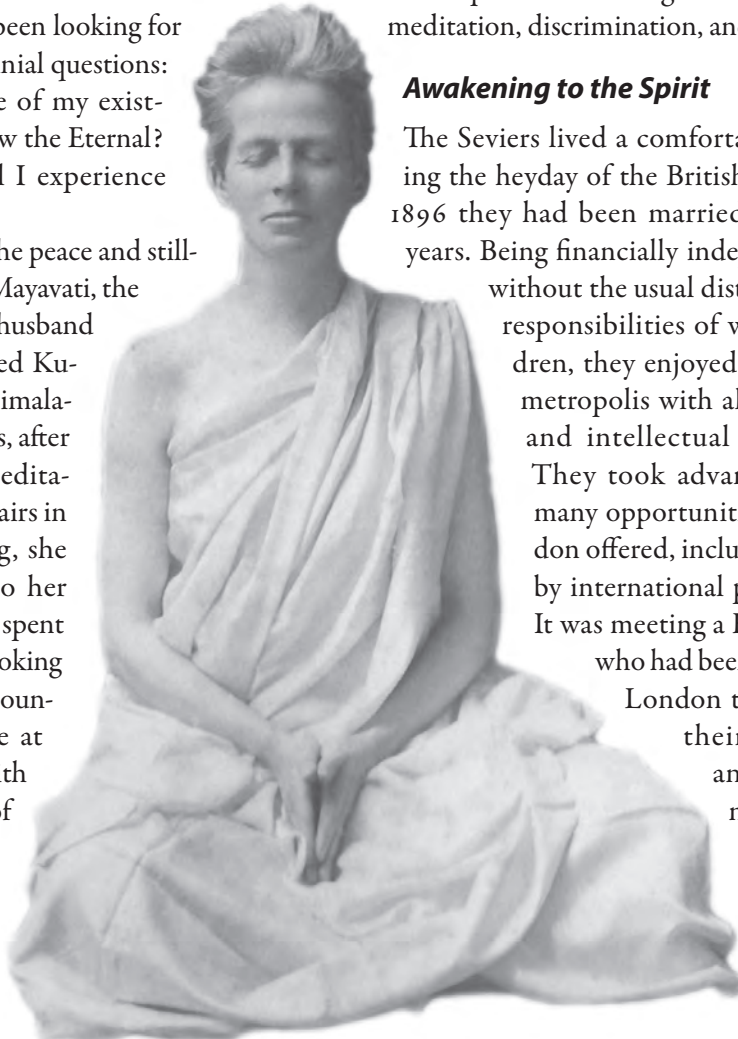
She remembered the peace and stillness she felt living at Mayavati, the ashrama she and her husband founded in an isolated Kumaon region of the Himalayas. In those early days, after her early morning meditation in her room upstairs in the ashrama building, she would walk down to her bungalow, where she spent the rest of the day—looking at the snow-capped mountains, hearing nature at every step filled her with wonder. Usually one of the servants walked down with her because there were many wild animals

and also because they were always anxious to tell her something about their families, or the village, or request her to pay for something that was needed. Then she would spend her day tending her garden, cooking her meals, distributing medicines to the villagers and workers, editing articles or books on Vedanta. It was a wonderful life. She loved inviting one of the monks for tea and making some British delicacy with her portable oven, hearing about their concerns and struggles, and talking about Vivekananda.

This is Charlotte's story: how a privileged woman of the Victorian era is transformed into the 'mother'—a woman of fearlessness, strength, and compassion—through the practice of meditation, discrimination, and selflessness.

Awakening to the Spirit

The Seviars lived a comfortable life during the heyday of the British Empire. By 1896 they had been married for twenty years. Being financially independent and without the usual distractions and responsibilities of work or children, they enjoyed the thriving metropolis with all its cultural and intellectual advantages. They took advantage of the many opportunities that London offered, including lectures by international personalities. It was meeting a Hindu monk who had been lecturing in London that changed their lives into an inner journey towards peace and unity. This monk, Swami



Vivekananda, had come to London the previous year and became the talk of the town.

Charlotte lived with her husband James—known as Harry—Sevier in South Hampstead, a newly developed neighbourhood in fashionable London. Charlotte was forty-nine and Henry fifty-one when they first heard Vivekananda speak. As seekers of truth the Seviars were both ‘preoccupied with religious questions,’⁴ and ‘were disappointed with the forms and theological dogmas that passed under the name of religion.’⁵ They may have been spiritualists for some time as well.⁶ An interview in a Madras paper reports that ‘for twenty years, Mr and Mrs Sevier had followed no particular religion, finding satisfaction in none of those that were preached.’⁷ Having heard about an ‘Indian yogi’ from a friend, they sought the first opportunity to hear him when he returned to London during his second visit.⁸

Captain James Henry Sevier had been in the British Army in India for five years and was probably associated with social clubs, had contacts with former officers, and was interested in people and events related to India. Charlotte Sevier may have been typical of the upper class, a well-to-do married woman involved in social, cultural, and charitable activities when she first met Swami Vivekananda. She has been described as ‘short, active, intelligent, kindly.’⁹ In photographs, probably taken in London before leaving for India, both Charlotte and her husband are dressed formally. She had short, blond hair pulled back from her forehead; he wore a heavy moustache. Their eyes are intense and focused.

During his first visit to England, Vivekananda made many friends, but it was the second visit that solidified the friendship with those who would become his disciples and sacrifice everything for him and for the mission of Vedanta. The importance of Vivekananda’s second visit

to London is not so much its public significance but that the people he gathered were ‘some of the most diligent and heroic workers and helpers in his cause.’¹⁰

It was in May or June that Charlotte first met Vivekananda. Marie Louise Burke writes that the Seviars ‘somehow found Swamiji’ and ‘were to become two of his most devoted and loyal followers.’¹¹ According to *The Life of Swami Vivekananda*, the Seviars met Vivekananda during his public lectures in June 1896. However, they may have started attending his talks as early as May, when they began an intensive period of study with him.

It was not until they heard the swami speak that they ‘found a religion that satisfied their heart and intellect.’¹² Being in the frequent company of Vivekananda, hearing his thoughts expressed in a spontaneous manner, without fanfare or dogma, without ego or pretension, the Seviars found answers to their lifelong search for meaning. This is evident from an interaction between Captain Sevier and Josephine MacLeod following one of the swami’s lectures in London.¹³

Josephine MacLeod—familiarly known as Tantine and also referred to as Joe, Joe-Joe, or Vijaya—was one of Vivekananda’s most fervent American followers. An unmarried woman of independent means, Tantine met Vivekananda in New York in 1895. From the first encounter she felt she had found the Truth. She travelled around the world to serve Vivekananda’s mission, helped introduce him to some of the best thinkers and writers of the time, stood by him during his early struggles in the West, and was actively involved in his mission in India.

Joe, who did not know the Seviars, spoke to Captain Sevier one evening after a talk by the swami, when he asked her: ‘[Do] you know this young man? Is he what he seems?’ (Ibid.). Miss MacLeod replied: ‘Yes.’ Then Captain Sevier

responded: 'In that case one must follow him and with him find God' (ibid.). He recognized the power of Vivekananda's words and understood him to be a man of truth, someone who had experienced that of which he spoke.

Following this conversation Captain Sevier approached his wife and asked her: "Will you let me become the Swami's disciple?" She replied, "Yes." She asked him, "Will you let me become the Swami's disciple?" He replied with affectionate humour, "I don't know. ..." (ibid.). This interaction shows both the affectionate relationship they had and their comfort in joking with each other, atypical of most Victorian era marriages.

One tries to imagine how the Seviers felt when they heard Vivekananda speak about raja yoga in May or jnana yoga in June. The strength of his conviction, based on his experience, must have created an instant and spontaneous resonance in their hearts. Imagine hearing Vivekananda saying: 'The whole world is full of the Lord. Open your eyes and see Him. This is what Vedanta teaches.'¹⁴ Not only were the Seviers hearing Vivekananda say these words, they saw in him a living example of a person who had broken the bonds of attachment and could see God in everything.

The Seviers were not alone in their attraction to the ideas expressed by Vivekananda. 'Hundreds were caught up in the grandeur and freshness of the thought he sent forth. Many distinguished Anglican clergymen, intellectuals, as well as society people were captivated, until it seemed as if some great movement was about to be born in his name.'¹⁵ This did not happen, since no formal organization was begun in London during his lifetime.

Most of the swami's classes during that spring were held in London at 63 St George's Road, now known as St George's Drive. The hall held

about a hundred to hundred and fifty people.¹⁶ This five-storey house accommodated the swami and his male guests and was probably the place where the Seviers and others met the swami privately as well.

The Seviers may have seen Vivekananda several times a day since he held morning classes that usually lasted one and half hours, received visitors in the afternoons, and in the evenings he often had a class or a question-and-answer session. They had the leisure to attend as many talks as they chose, and they were fascinated. During the month of June and the first half of July 1896 Swami Vivekananda conducted multiple classes each week and began a series of lectures at the Royal Institute of Painters, located at 191 Piccadilly. It is most likely that the Seviers attended all of his lectures as well as his classes. Burke surmises that they attended the classes unobtrusively among the many who sat absorbed by Vivekananda's powerful words in the double drawing room, yet there are no records to conclude who attended the classes (ibid.).

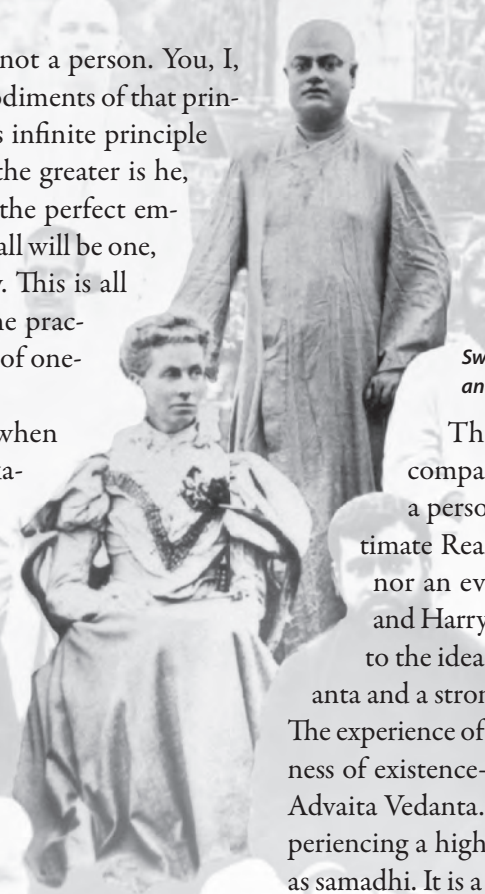
The Life of Swami Vivekananda, originally written by Swami Virajananda and edited by Mrs Sevier, states that both husband and wife were 'earnest students of religion and had sought for the highest truth in various sects and creeds, but none of these had satisfied the yearning of their souls.'¹⁷ After comparing notes Charlotte and Harry were surprised that they each felt intuitively and simultaneously that 'this is the man and this is the philosophy that we have been seeking in vain all through our life!' (Ibid.). It was the Advaita philosophy that appealed to them most, while the personality of the swami also fascinated them.

Advaita is a school of Vedanta philosophy that teaches the oneness of God, soul, and the universe. Vivekananda explained this oneness: 'The eternal, the infinite, the omnipresent, the

omniscient is a principle, not a person. You, I, and everyone are but embodiments of that principle, and the more of this infinite principle is embodied in a person, the greater is he, and all in the end will be the perfect embodiment of that and thus all will be one, as they are now essentially. This is all there is of religion, and the practice is through this feeling of oneness that is love.’¹⁸

As mentioned above, when the Seviers met with Vivekananda privately for the first time he addressed Mrs Sevier as ‘mother’. This was not unusual, since it is customary among Indians, especially Bengalis, to address older and sometimes even younger women as ‘mother’. In America he had addressed two other women, Mrs Sara Bull and Mrs Ellen Hale, in the same manner. It is at this juncture that Vivekananda uttered the statement that Charlotte would remember for the rest of her life. He asked her: ‘Would you not like to come to India? I will give you of my best realizations.’ This was Vivekananda’s prophetic vision of Charlotte’s future destiny.

From that day the Seviers accepted the swami as their spiritual guide, and their relationship with him was parental, always seeking to provide and protect him. ‘They looked upon him not only as their guru, but as their own son.’¹⁹ This attitude remained constant throughout their lifetime. In Hinduism a definite relationship with one’s teacher and one’s object of worship is developed, leading one to a more intense and defined relationship.



Swami Vivekananda with Mrs Sevier (seated) and Captain Sevier (to his left) in Calcutta, 1897

The experience of being in the company of a highly evolved person, a person who has experienced the ultimate Reality, is not easy to understand, nor an everyday occurrence. Charlotte and Harry developed a firm commitment to the ideas and practices of Advaita Vedanta and a strong desire to further these ideas. The experience of the ultimate Reality—the oneness of existence—is the goal in the practice of Advaita Vedanta. Often this is equated with experiencing a high state of consciousness known as samadhi. It is a rare state of consciousness and not something understood by most people, even by seekers of truth.

Repeatedly the Seviers heard about higher states of consciousness and were given instructions on how to reach it. Swami Vivekananda referred to Captain and Mrs Sevier as his disciples in letters written to both Western and Indian friends and devotees.

What exactly is a disciple and what happens during initiation? For serious spiritual aspirants in Vedanta and other paths, instructions about meditation and spiritual practices are given by a teacher. This is referred to as initiation. By following the instructions of the teacher or guru with faith and regularity the mind becomes free from distractions, and the purified mind ultimately becomes the teacher. One experiences peace and reaches a level of deeper



*In Mayavati, top row (left to right): Swamis Prakashananda, Swarupananda, and Sacchidananda;
bottom row: Mrs Sevier, Swamis Nirbhayananda, Virajananda, Vimalananda, and Brahmachari Amritananda*

understanding. This process, according to Vedanta, may take years or lifetimes to remove the veil of ignorance that binds one to the world. The instructions one is given during initiation are normally not shared and may be different from those of others, based upon one's temperament, tendencies, and other factors.

There are references to Swami Vivekananda having disciples. Very few of them have written about their initiation. One swami shared his experience and revealed the state of Vivekananda's mind at the time:

He took me to a small room, and sitting down on a small rug asked me to sit on another.

Soon, Swamiji entered into a meditative state and passed into the realm of *savikalpa samadhi*—the body still, limbs motionless, spine erect, eyes fixed and bright; with feeling,

power, love, and bliss welling up in his face, and gravity intensifying all the other moods. ...

After remaining immersed in samadhi for quite some time, he controlled his mind and taking my right hand in his own, remained quiet for a while. Next he started telling me about my past. ... When Swamiji was holding my hand, all my desires and thoughts subsided. There was neither inclination nor disinclination—no desire, no wish; even bhakti and mukti were gone. All was peace; the world was peaceful, steady and calm. Creation was, Creation was not; [all was] filled with bliss. And there was something beyond bliss that I cannot describe in words—I began to enjoy that. Peace, peace, supreme peace—all-pervading peace. ...

I do not know how long I was in that state. Slowly I found my mind descending from that high state and entering my body, and I started

faintly apprehending the room and other objects, like one just awakened from sleep. ... But one new thing became evident—a sweetness and peace pervaded all objects. Every object appeared holy and dear to me, something to be revered. I saw that the wind was holy, space was holy, the waters were holy, the directions were holy, every created being was holy!²⁰

When Vivekananda initiated Charlotte and Harry as his disciples is not known. Both the Seviers and the swami considered themselves bound in a teacher-student relationship, which, besides the instructions they received, is an important aspect of accepting a teacher and being a spiritual aspirant.

Romain Rolland writes: ‘They looked upon the Swami as their own child, and devoted themselves, as we shall see, to the building of the Advaita Ashrama, of which he had dreamed, in the Himalayas, for meditation on the impersonal God: for it was Advaitism that had especially attracted them in the thought of Vivekananda, and for him also it was the essential [thing].’²¹



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The Visible Flame of Kali

Sudesh Garg

SRI RAMAKRISHNA SAYS: ‘One’s own Chosen Deity is one’s own Self. The Chosen Deity and the Atman are identical. The vision of the Chosen Deity is equivalent to Self-knowledge.’¹ We read with awe about Sri Ramakrishna’s fierce longing and superhuman austerities that he underwent to have the vision of Kali, his Ishta, Chosen Deity. The first wonderful vision of Kali, as an unbounded ocean of light, filled him with divine bliss and resulted in his uninterrupted communion with the Mother—his own Atman. Due to his intense absorption in the Divine Mother, the highest state of ecstasy, called mahabhava, was constantly noticeable in Sri Ramakrishna. Inebriated with spiritual joy he chanted Mother’s name; he danced, laughed, cried, and conversed with her. Completely oblivious of his surroundings and with his whole being merged in Kali, he sometimes sang devotional songs for hours, soaking his chest with tears of joy. In ecstatic states he mumbled to her invisible presence in a mysterious language, barely audible or entirely unintelligible to those around him. At times he importuned the Divine Mother like a child, begging her to reveal her world-bewitching form. For the sake of the devotees he also prayed to her in such pathetic tones that it melted even the most stony hearts. He also quarrelled with her for sending him crowds of worthless people. In all these instances it appeared to devotees that the Master was having a tangible vision of the Divine Mother, that he was directly singing, dancing, and talking to her and she was answering his questions. So near and intimate was he with the Divine Mother!

To read the life of Sri Ramakrishna is to learn about the sport of this divine child—pure, innocent, and guileless—with Kali. It is to hear the dialogue of the embodied soul with the supreme Soul; to hear the outpourings of his soul through the mystic songs of Ramprasad and Kamalakanta in his inimitably melodious voice; to see his exquisite and celestial dance completely filled with ecstatic love and to identify heart and soul with the Divine Mother; to hear words of wisdom, holy as the words of the Vedas, as coming directly from the goddess of wisdom. It is to have a glimpse of the eternal flame, Kali, through her visible flame, Sri Ramakrishna. Blessed are those who witness and participate in it. The waves of spiritual bliss that his divine life create transport us to an ethereal plane, wiping out all anxieties and troubles. Holy Mother saw this soul-enthraling divine play from the Nahabat through a hole in the straw screen. Speaking of this period she later said that she felt immeasurable bliss in her heart. Joyfully, she freely distributed it to all, and yet the bliss remained full inside her. By turning our gaze within, we too can visualize this extraordinary divine drama, which is being eternally enacted in the hearts of the devotees. By contemplating and meditating on this visible flame of Kali, we too can experience a little of that bliss and peace.

Identified with Kali

Who are you Sri Ramakrishna that by contemplating on your divine form our minds are drawn to seek Kali? Are you Kali, the embodiment of Brahman’s power? On a Kali Puja day in 1885, at Shyampukur, Sri Ramakrishna’s close devotees

did see the manifestation of the goddess in him. A day before the puja Sri Ramakrishna instructed devotees to prepare the articles for worshipping the goddess. On the auspicious day he sat quietly without performing the worship or asking anyone to do so. Girishchandra Ghosh thought:

Might it not be then that these preparations were meant for the devotees, so that they might be blessed by worshipping the Mother of the universe in the living image of the Master's person? ... Thinking so, he was beside himself with joy and, suddenly taking the flowers and the sandal-paste that were lying there before all, offered handfuls of them at the lotus feet of the Master uttering, 'Victory to the Mother'. At this all the hairs of the Master's body stood on end, and he entered into profound ecstasy, his face radiating effulgence, his lips adorned with a divine smile and both his hands assuming the attitude of granting boons and freedom from fear—all indicated the manifestation of the divine Mother in him.²

Has the cosmic Shakti incarnated in flesh in this age to enjoy her own bliss and share it with devotees? The identification with Kali was so great and natural that Sri Ramakrishna often worshipped himself with flowers and sandal-paste meant for worshipping the Deity. He said: 'Beloved Mother, how can I offer my life and mind to you? It is you who have become my life and mind.'³ When Sri Ramakrishna's neck became bent because of the pain in his throat due to a cancerous sore, Kali too had her neck bent, as seen by Holy Mother in a vision.

When Sri Ramakrishna entered *maha-samadhi*, Holy Mother burst into tears and cried out in a heart-rending voice: 'Mother Kali, where have you gone?' What a sweet and mysterious relationship existed between Sri Ramakrishna and Holy Mother! Each regarded the other as the living image of Kali, because it was

the one Reality manifest in two forms. He told her: 'Truly, I look upon you as a form of the blissful divine Mother.'⁴ They were two tongues of the one eternal flame.

Kali removes the terrors of the world by slaying the demoniac foes and by giving shelter to the fear-stricken gods. For some she may appear as the image of destruction, but she is the benign Mother who plays with *kala*, time, and whose very name destroys the fear of death. Is Kali of black hue? Not when she is seen from close, when she brilliantly lights the inmost shrine of the devotees' hearts. Kali is the divine maya, the inscrutable power of Brahman, by which the universe is created, sustained, and into which it is finally absorbed. Though Kali is one with the action-less, indivisible, attribute-less, infinite, and absolute Brahman, she binds herself with attributes and becomes the many to behold her own creation. This truth is personified in the symbology of Kali performing her cosmic dance on the breast of Shiva, who lies immobile.

Union of Shiva and Shakti

The *Katha Upanishad* declares: 'The Purusha, who is of the size of a thumb, is like a light without smoke. He is the ruler of the past and the future. He exists today, and He will exist tomorrow. This is that.'⁵ Sri Ramakrishna says: 'With ordinary people the mind dwells in these three planes, at the organs of evacuation and generation and at the navel. When the mind ascends to the fourth plane, the centre designated in Yoga as Anahata, it sees the individual soul as a flame. Besides, it sees light. At this the aspirant cries: "Ah! What is this? Ah! What is this?"'⁶ It is astonishing to read that Sri Ramakrishna actually saw his soul as a flame: 'Another day I saw rice, vegetables, and other food-stuff, and filth and dirt as well, lying around. Suddenly the soul came out of my body and, like a flame,

touched everything. It was like a protruding tongue of fire and tasted everything once, even the excreta. It was revealed to me that all these are one Substance, the non-dual and indivisible Consciousness' (282).

Everything gross and subtle, animate and inanimate, appeared to Sri Ramakrishna as pervaded with bliss and the one eternal Consciousness. Sri Ramakrishna saw the whole world and every phenomenon in it as the lila, sport, of Shiva and Shakti. He also found that his own body too was made of the same Consciousness. One day Mathur Babu saw from where he was seated in the mansion Sri Ramakrishna pacing back and forth in an indrawn mood near the veranda of his room. Mathur was astonished to see that as Sri Ramakrishna paced up and down the veranda he was adopting the form of Kali and Shiva alternately. When he walked towards the Kali temple, and to where Mathur Babu was sitting, he appeared as Kali; when he turned and walked in the opposite direction, towards the Shiva temples, he appeared as Shiva. Mathur repeatedly rubbed his eyes and finally dashed to Sri Ramakrishna falling prostrate at his feet.⁷



Kali is the mystic dweller in every living being. She is the sleeping coiled kundalini at the base of spinal cord, called *muladhara*, the root receptacle. Unless she is awakened a person lives in ignorance, running after worldly pleasures and experiencing untold miseries. Through intense bhakti or yogic disciplines the kundalini awakes and ascends along the *sushumna* canal in the centre of the spinal cord, piercing the lotuses in the five centres and raising the consciousness of the aspirant higher and higher. When this power arrives at the *sahasrara*, thousand-petalled lotus, in the crown of the head, where Shiva dwells, the person goes into samadhi. But Sri Ramakrishna's kundalini could often pierce and travel all the centres to ascend to the *sahasrara* and descend down easily and quickly to the *anahata*, the heart centre. He supplicated Kali not to make him unconscious with the bliss of Brahman, as he wanted to see and play with her, and to make merry with the devotees by chanting her names and glories. Sri Ramakrishna's mind would easily enter into samadhi on its own, but he used to force it down to the *anahata* in order to bring succour to suffering humanity and to direct seekers of truth to his blissful Divine Mother. Though Shiva and the Divine Mother are eternally united, the scriptures declare that the Divine Mother had to undergo much austerity to obtain Shiva as her divine consort, and this too to set an example for humans. Similarly, though eternally united with the Divine Mother, Sri Ramakrishna had to undertake tremendous sadhana to later impart that force to the world and awaken our dormant spirituality.


Who Seized Whom?

To the utter astonishment of his Vedanta guru Totapuri, Sri Ramakrishna attained the highest state of realization, *nirvikalpa* samadhi, in just one night. After Totapuri's departure Sri

Ramakrishna remained for six months in a state of total identity with the homogenous and luminous Consciousness, designated as Brahman. In that supreme state one's individual existence disappears; nothing remains except supreme bliss. Ordinary people, and even high souls, cannot detach from that bliss and come down to the relative existence. But Sri Ramakrishna could do so, as the Divine Mother commanded him to remain in *bhavamukha*, the state between relative and absolute existence. Who can say whether the Mother seized the son and brought him down in order to arrest the decline of dharma, to establish the harmony of religions, and to work for the well-being of humanity, or had the son 'devoured' the Divine Mother and installed her in his heart to teach humankind the way to God through love, devotion, knowledge, and renunciation? Sri Ramakrishna taught a direct path to attain the Divine Mother, beyond scriptural injunctions of complicated rites and rituals, beyond external dogmas and conventions. The attitude necessary for this path is the natural craving of the child for his mother. This was the purest and the safest path for this age.

'[During his twelve years of *sadhana*] the Master did not know when the sun rose or when it set. He did not know whether he had taken food or not. Occasionally when a moment's consciousness would come, he would feel as if someone were dwelling inside him and he would ask: "Who are you? Why are you here?" So completely had the Mother possessed him!'⁸ Once, as Sri Ramakrishna was leaving Viswases' house, Sri Ramakrishna heard Bamandas say about him: 'Goodness gracious! The Divine Mother has caught hold of him, like a tiger seizing a man.'⁹ On the other hand, Sri Ramakrishna expressed: 'I used to go into samadhi uttering the word "Ma". While uttering the word, I would draw the Mother of the Universe to me, as it were, like

the fishermen casting their net and after a while drawing it in. When they draw in the net they find big fish inside it' (382).

Swami Akhandananda says: 'Whoever visited the Master was blessed with various spiritual visions during meditation. People visualized and talked with their Chosen Deity as they sat with half-closed eyes.'¹⁰ In Sri Ramakrishna's presence an experience of overflowing bliss carried all to a region beyond sorrows where peace and joy flow eternally and inexhaustibly. The devotees realized that he who is their guru is also their Ishta, their Self—the Self of their selves—the sanctifying and visible manifestation of the eternal flame of Kali. Just as a lamp is lit with the light of another lamp, millions of souls today all over the world have Sri Ramakrishna as their Ishta, and as a result their hearts and minds are lighted through the visible flame of Kali. If we are not drawn to the flame, the flame will pursue and draw us. Sri Ramakrishna says: 'Tarak of Belgharia was going home from Dakshineswar. I clearly noticed that a flame-like thing came out of this [meaning his body] and followed him. A few days later Tarak came back to Dakshineswar.'¹¹ 

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Nature and Conceptions of God

Umesh Gulati

WE DO NOT KNOW how God sees us, but we can know how we see God by what we are and how we think. *USA Today*, in its 7 October 2010 issue, carried the article 'How America sees God' by Cathy Lynn Grossman,¹ which reviewed *The Four Gods* by Paul Froese and Christopher Bader.² The article begins with the assertion that although nine out of ten US citizens believe in God, they all have four main views: 28% look upon God as 'authoritative'; 22% see him as 'benevolent'; 21% view God as 'critical'; and 24% believe God to be 'distant'. The remaining 5% are atheists or agnostics. People viewing God as authoritative assert that the US will lose God's favour 'unless we get right with him'. They also think that like an absolute monarch, God will mete out harsh punishments to those who do not follow his commandments. People who see God as benevolent look upon him as engaged in our world, caring and supporting us. Believers in a critical God, the majority of whom are poor, think God keeps an eye on this world but delivers justice in the next. Those

who see a distant God say he created the universe and then left humanity alone. It is a view of God who is behind every phenomena of nature. According to the study, a distant God is the dominant view of the Jews and many followers of world religions like Buddhism and Hinduism. In a striking contrast with the views in the US, the commonly held belief in European countries is that God created the world through something like a Big Bang and let it spin without any direct influence on daily life.

We Make Our World and God

Another common element in all these views is the belief in a masculine personal God, who is separate from us and lives far away. Since we are persons, to us God is a person too, with qualities of authority, anger, benevolence, love, and indifference. As we think, so we believe and become. The survey makes it clear that people are actually superimposing their ideas and personalities on God. Karen Armstrong, once a nun and now a well-known writer, expresses in *A History of God* with relation to Abrahamic religions: 'I expected

to find that God had simply been a projection of human needs and desires. I thought that “he” would mirror the fears and yearnings of society at each stage of its development. My predictions were not entirely unjustified but I have been extremely surprised at some of my findings and I wish I had learnt all this thirty years ago, when I was starting out in religious life.’³

Although people generally possess in themselves a mixture of all the four characteristics mentioned above, which are attributed to God, they still differ from one another in having one predominant characteristic. For example, those who say that God is ‘authoritative’, we suspect, are domineering. And just like children whose father is domineering tend to be fearful of his wrath, so also people with authoritative tendencies would regard God with fear. As an illustration I can cite something I saw during my primary school days, in a city that is now in Pakistan. It was a Christian missionary school and the headmaster was authoritarian. Outside his office there was a poster that declared: ‘Fear of God is the Beginning of Knowledge’.

Those belonging to the ‘benevolent’ group seem to us generally generous and nice towards others. Their God is a ruler who loves, cares, and supports everyone. God is a force of good that feels concern for all people, heathen or not, weeps at our conflicts, and comforts us.

Those who view God as ‘critical’ often tend to blame the society, their fellow beings, their employers, and so forth for their being poor and miserable. The survey says that generally these people are not affluent and highly educated. They have complete faith in the ‘just’ God, who would compensate them in heaven, and perhaps, punish those who were unjust towards them on earth. This reminds me of another incident in the same school. Once a missionary lectured on God and his commands, which he said we

must obey. Among the many things he said was that God, our father, loves those children most whom their earthly fathers do not love. Then he asked: ‘Is there anyone amongst you whom their fathers do not love? Out of more than hundred boys I saw only two raise hands to indicate that their fathers did not love them. I knew one of them very well. He was not good in studies despite all that his parents did—hiring extra tutors for his homework and trying to create an interest in studies. This boy used to mix with bad boys who persuaded him to steal money from home. His father used to cane him for all these reasons. Obviously he was one of the two boys whom their fathers did not love! These boys were asked to come to the front and the preacher said: ‘God loves such children the most that are denied love.’

Being ‘distant’ implies indifference. As the people who see God as ‘distant’ do not consider that God is like a magistrate who punishes one’s sins and rewards one’s virtues, they take personal responsibility for what they do. Buddhists and Hindus are classed in this category. The Bhagavadgita says: ‘The Omnipresent neither accepts anybody’s sin nor even virtue. Knowledge remains covered by ignorance. Thereby creatures become deluded.’⁴ In other words, such people are the makers of their own destiny. Not only the Buddhists and Hindus, but the followers of all other religions that originated in India believe in the law of karma. According to this law, one reaps what one sows; if one conducts oneself virtuously, one will reap the fruit of those virtues in this life or in the lives to come. The law of karma is also associated with the law of rebirth and the belief that each soul has to rectify one’s mistakes and reach liberation.

The survey on the four views of God referred to accessed only beliefs of God in the US in 2010. Karen Armstrong says:

Despite its otherworldliness, religion is highly pragmatic. We shall see that it is far more important for a particular idea of God to *work* than for it to be logically or scientifically sound. As soon as it ceases to be effective it will be changed—sometimes for something radically different. This did not disturb most monotheists before our own day because they were quite clear that their ideas about God were not sacrosanct but could only be provisional. They were entirely man-made—they could be nothing else—and quite separate from the indescribable Reality they symbolised.⁵

It follows that the views of US citizens regarding God could also be provisional and subject to change. This principle also applies to atheists and agnostics, who perhaps do not agree with our conventional ideas of God. Nobody would be surprised to see these views changing according to the changes in the US economy, the political climate, the way the fear to terrorist attacks is handled, or how social issues like aid to the poor and unemployment are solved, or how school education is funded and immigration reforms are implemented. Above all, one's views depend upon one's state of mind at the time of the survey.

Besides, what people say about God and how God appears to them also depends on how cultures have historically perceived God. For example, in Hinduism there are references to the ability some people have to apprehend God: 'Of that (Self), which is not available for the mere hearing to many, (and) which many do not understand even while hearing, the expounder is wonderful and the receiver is wonderful; wonderful is he who knows under the instruction of an adept.'⁶ Even among those who sincerely strive to know God only a few are successful. The Gita declares: 'Among thousands of men a rare one endeavours for

perfection. Even among the perfected ones who are diligent, one perchance knows Me in truth.'⁷ These verses describe the condition of most humanity with regard to religion and God.

The German philosopher Immanuel Kant has shown that the external world is unknown and unknowable. What we know is a representation of the world read by the mind. If this is the case with the world, how can we have any absolute and crystallized view of God? God is then even more unknown and unknowable. Vedanta uses an illustration to show how we superimpose our ideas on something: 'There was a stump of a tree, and in the dark, a thief came that way and said, "That is a policeman." A young man waiting for his beloved saw it and thought that it was his sweetheart. A child who had been told ghost stories took it for a ghost and began to shriek. But all the time it was the stump of a tree. We see the world as we are.'⁸

God as the Reality

Sri Ramakrishna says: 'What Brahman is cannot be described. All the things of the world—the Vedas, the Puranas, the Tantras, the six systems of philosophy—have been defiled, like food that has been touched by the tongue, for they have been read or uttered by the tongue. Only one thing has not been defiled in this way, and that is Brahman. No one has been able to say what Brahman is.'⁹

He also teaches the same truth through an analogy: 'Once a salt doll went to measure the depth of the ocean. (*All laugh.*) It wanted to tell others how deep the water was. But this it could never do, for no sooner did it get into the water than it melted. Now who was left to report the ocean's depth?' (103).

All religions have to ask the ultimate question about the reality of the One and the many. How did the One become the many? The One

absolute Reality is called Brahman in Vedanta. The same One becomes the many through maya. The One and the many are not separate. Two degrees of the same reality are described in the Upanishads: *nirguna*, without qualities, and *saguna*, with qualities. Nirguna Brahman is the transcendent Reality and Saguna Brahman the immanent. This reality is impersonal-personal. Saguna Brahman is called Ishvara, popularly translated as God. In monotheistic religions people speak of God creating the universe and all that it contains, yet God is outside creation, like a potter separate from the pots. In Vedanta God is the creator as well as the created—the efficient as well as the material cause of the universe. The *Mundaka Upanishad* teaches: ‘As a spider spreads out and withdraws (its threads), as on the earth grow the herbs (and trees), and as from the living man issues out hair (on the head and body), so out of the imperishable does the universe emerge here (in this phenomenal creation).’¹⁰ Hence, God in Vedanta refers to that infinite Reality that is transcendental as well as immanent as the inner Self, the Atman, of all. In its transcendent state Brahman is beyond the purview of our senses and mind; the immanent Brahman is the eternal witness within everyone. Sri Ramakrishna describes the two aspects as a motionless snake and a snake in motion. Further, he also says that Brahman and maya are like fire and its power to burn, or like milk and its whiteness; thinking of one aspect, the other one is also recalled. ‘When we talk of fire we automatically mean also its power to burn. Again, the fire’s power to burn implies the fire itself. If you accept the one you must accept the other.’¹¹

Ishvara has no personality—as we understand personality—the universe and all that it contains are the limiting adjuncts of Ishvara. In other words, Ishvara is the sum total of all

personalities. Swami Vivekananda says: ‘The Impersonal God is a living God, a principle. The difference between personal and impersonal is this, that the personal is only a man, and the impersonal idea is that He is the angel, the man, the animal, and yet something more which we cannot see, because impersonality includes all personalities, is the sum total of everything in the universe, and infinitely more besides.’¹² There exists the principle behind the personalities of all living beings and also behind the world, and this principle is universal and infinite. As universality and infinity cannot be divided, nor there can be two, God, humans, and the world are one. The principle is absolute and personalities are relative, or one could say that personalities are manifestations of the principle. Swamiji says: ‘He [the personal God] is the highest reading of the Impersonal that can be reached by the human intellect’ (2.337).

Vedanta does not accept God as someone merely sitting far away in the sky. Yet, Vedanta can also include this concept, just as it does with everything else in the universe. In the Gita Sri Krishna says: ‘Of this world I am the father, mother, ordainer, grandfather; I am the knowable, the sanctifier, the syllable Om as also Rik, Sama, and Yajur [Vedas]. (I am) the fruit of actions, the nourisher, the Lord, witness, abode, refuge, friend, origin, end, foundation, store, and the imperishable seed.’¹³ To inspire Arjuna Sri Krishna revealed his cosmic form, through which Arjuna saw everything—from gods to inanimate things, past, present, and future, good and bad, creation and destruction—as being the body of God.

Brahman is described as Satchidananda, existence-consciousness-bliss; therefore, each individual is also of a similar nature. The world is thus deified and we live and move and have our being in God. We cling to personalities—ours, others’

God's—and are thus frightened, miserable, and think of ourselves as moral or immoral. If we see ourselves and others as immortal, blissful, and divine, we become free. Vedanta has placed freedom as the goal to be attained by everyone. How can we impute a little personality to God? The Gita says: 'That, which has hands and feet everywhere, which has eyes, heads, and mouths everywhere, which has ears everywhere, exists in creatures by pervading all. Shining through the functions of all the organs, (yet) devoid of all the organs; unattached and verily the supporter of all; without qualities and the perceiver of all qualities. Existing outside and inside all beings; moving as well as non-moving; It is incomprehensible due to subtleness. So also, It is far away, and yet near' (13.13–5).

Today science declares that all matter and everything in the universe has transmuted and evolved from one substance; all different forces have sprung from one force; all life in its various forms has sprung from one source. Both force and matter, from which life has sprung, are different manifestations of the same substance; in essence everything is one. The One appearing as the many! Besides, several scientists are boldly declaring today that what is known as matter is simply empty space, and all its states—solid, liquid, gas, and plasma—are not real but an illusion. If our conception of the universe is changing with the rise of such knowledge, so will our conception of God change. Science is tending towards discovering the unity in variety on the physical plane. Vedanta declares the spiritual unity in diversity. That is why both science and Vedanta are converging to form one continuum.

Seeking God

Instead of persisting in our *adhyaropa*, superimposition, of ideas of God on God, we need to attempt *apavada*, de-superimposition, of

our ideas of God to see God. Instead of searching for God in the clouds, Vedanta asks us to plunge into ourselves to discover our true nature. Instead of projecting our ideas outside, we must internalize God. 'The Atman that is subtler than the subtle and greater than the great, is lodged in the heart of (every) creature. A desireless man sees that glory of the Atman through the serenity of the organs, and (thereby becomes) free from sorrow.'¹⁴ We laugh at the ideas of God among the ancients and in other cultures, but as Swamiji says: 'There will come men after us who will laugh at our ideas of religion and God in the same way that we laugh at those of the ancients.'¹⁵ As humankind evolves, as our needs become vastly different from those of our ancestors, we evolve higher and higher conceptions of God.

What about the four views of God mentioned at the beginning? Are they all wrong? What about all the innumerable views of God in other religions and cultures? Are these also wrong? It is true that at this stage of ethical and intellectual development we approach God through our various views and ideas, but each view is valid for each person. Sri Ramakrishna succinctly says: 'So many views are so many paths.' God knows us better than we do ourselves, and God compassionately comes to us, if we are sincere, in the form we have been worshipping God. Sri Krishna declares: 'According to the manner in which they [devotees] approach Me, I favour them in that very manner. O son of Pritha [Arjuna], human beings follow My path in every way.'¹⁶ Karen Armstrong rightly points out: 'Indeed, there is a case for arguing that *Homo sapiens* is also *Homo religious*.'¹⁷ The seed to seek God is planted strongly in all of us. Whether we like it or not, we want God, we want freedom.

(Continued on page 321)

Meeting of Two Great Musicians

Brahmachari Suvimalachaitanya

JUST AS DURING HER LONG JOURNEY from the Himalayas to the sea, the Ganga benefits innumerable beings, so do great souls, whose lives bring inspiration to people scorched by torment and suffering. Swami Vivekananda, during his historic wanderings throughout India, met many people and spiritually transformed their lives. Bhairavi Kempegowda was among those fortunate ones; he met Swamiji twice, first at Mysore then at Calcutta.

Bhairavi Kempegowda's ancestors had moved to Coimbatore from Srirangapattanam, near Mysore, where he was born in 1857. His grandfather worked in a British firm. His father went into business and became wealthy. Though born in a fairly affluent family Kempegowda had austere habits and from childhood was passionate about music. At a young age, and against his parent's wishes, he left for Thiruvaiyaru in the Tanjore district, now in Tamil Nadu, to learn Carnatic music under the great Patnam Subrahmanya Iyer. Kempegowda was aware he may not be accepted as a student due to caste prejudices, so he sought employment as a servant in the guru's house in order to be near him. His remuneration for cleaning the house, taking care of cows, and doing other odd jobs was a meal a day.¹ His desire to learn music made him oblivious to difficulties and students' taunts. He used every opportunity to intently listen to the music lessons taught to the regular students. Slowly, Subrahmanya Iyer became impressed by Kempegowda's simplicity, hard work, and earnestness, and began training the youth in music.

On several occasions Subrahmanya Iyer said that he was proud of Kempegowda because of his diligence and quick grasp of music. He had even written to Chamarajendra Wadiyar, the maharaja of Mysore, about Kempegowda's musical talents. Once Subrahmanya Iyer was singing at a concert held at home and as it was getting late, Subrahmanya Iyer's wife asked Kempegowda to remind his guru about supper. Kempegowda was the only one who had free access to Subrahmanya Iyer at all times. Kempegowda waited for a while for the violin interlude to start and humbly requested his guru to have supper, adding that he would keep the audience engaged till then. This made Subrahmanya Iyer furious and demanded Kempegowda sing before him and the audience. Kempegowda hesitated for a while before singing the *bhairavi* raga from where his guru had left off. Everyone was spellbound by his beautiful voice and style. Subrahmanya Iyer was speechless with wonder, and when the concert was over he wrapped Kempegowda's shoulders with his shawl, gifted by the maharaja of Travancore. The guru expressed his joy by saying, 'you have made the *bhairavi* raga immortal'. Since Kempegowda was an expert in singing the *bhairavi* raga, he was hence known as Bhairavi Kempegowda. After some more years of training Kempegowda bid farewell with prostrations and tears in his eyes.²

Kempegowda returned to Coimbatore and married, but unfortunately the beautiful wife soon died. The shock made him realize the transitory nature of the world. Distressed, he left home and wandered, singing from place to place.

Attracted by Kempegowda's voice and personality many nautch girls and singers proposed marriage, but he disregarded them all. He poured his soul's anguish in singing and became averse to power, position, wealth, and fame. Kempegowda never cared for decorum and took to drinking. He even rejected the post of a court singer in the Mysore palace. When the maharaja asked the reason for his unwillingness, Kempegowda replied he loved his freedom more and did not want any part in palace politics.³

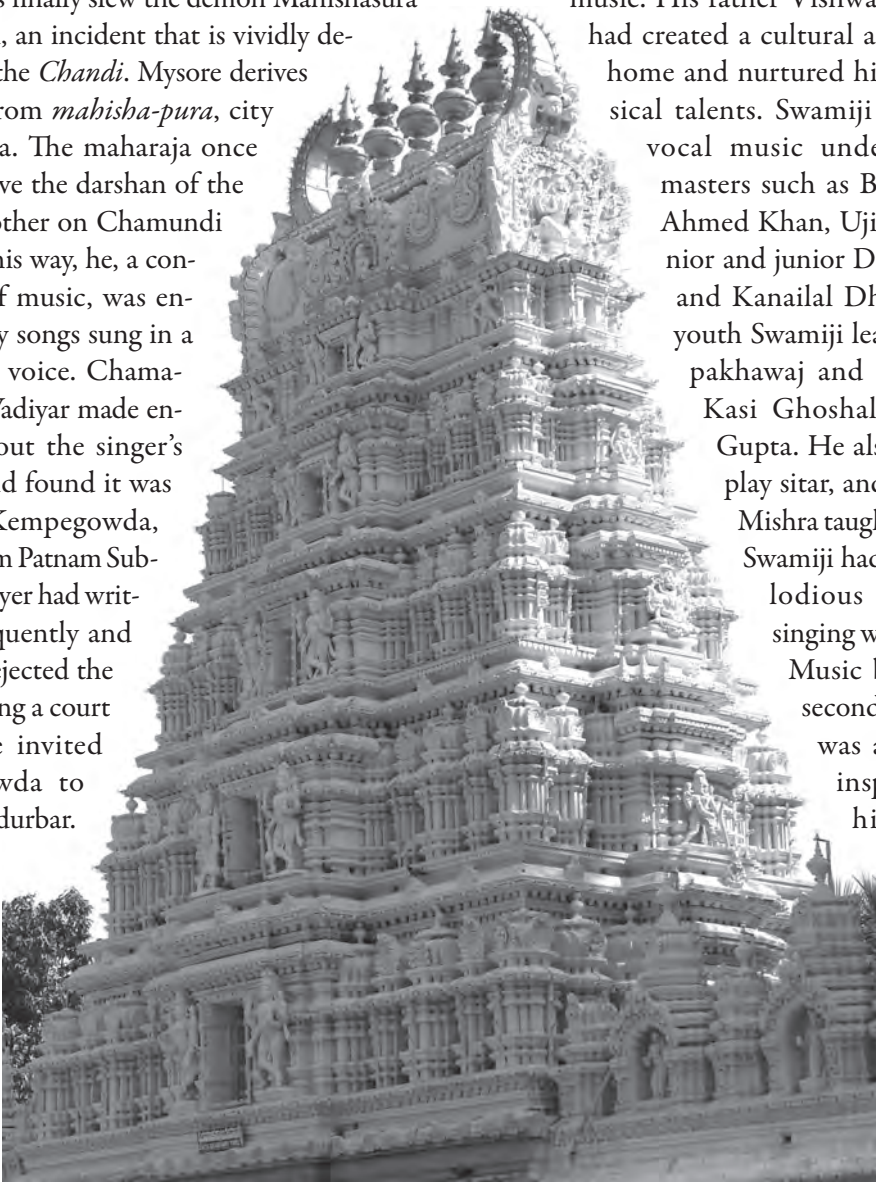
In Mysore stands a temple dedicated to the Divine Mother Chamundi. Legend says that the goddess finally slew the demon Mahishasura on this hill, an incident that is vividly described in the *Chandi*. Mysore derives its name from *mahisha-pura*, city of Mahisha. The maharaja once went to have the darshan of the Divine Mother on Chamundi Hills. On his way, he, a connoisseur of music, was enraptured by songs sung in a melodious voice. Chamarajendra Wadiyar made enquiries about the singer's identity and found it was Bhairavi Kempegowda, about whom Patnam Subrahmanya Iyer had written so eloquently and who had rejected the offer of being a court singer. He invited Kempegowda to sing in the durbar.

During his wandering days in South India, Swami Vivekananda reached Mysore in 1892 and for three or four weeks was the guest of Sir K Seshadri Iyer, dewan of Mysore. The dewan was deeply influenced by Swamiji's personality and knowledge and introduced him to the maharaja. The maharaja was also highly impressed and made Swamiji a state guest, giving him an apartment in the palace. 'Often he [Swamiji] was closeted with the Maharaja, who discoursed with him and sought his advice on many important matters.'⁴

From childhood Swamiji was proficient in music. His father Vishwanath Datta had created a cultural ambience at home and nurtured his son's musical talents. Swamiji trained in vocal music under reputed masters such as Beni Gupta, Ahmed Khan, Ujir Khan, senior and junior Dunn Khan, and Kanailal Dhendi. As a youth Swamiji learnt to play pakhawaj and tabla from Kasi Ghoshal and Beni Gupta. He also learnt to play sitar, and Jagannath Mishra taught him esraj. Swamiji had a very melodious voice and singing was his forte. Music became his second nature and was a source of inspiration to himself, his

PHOTO BY IAIN AND SARAH

Chamundeshwari Temple, Chamundi Hills, Mysore




family, and his friends. He was known as a musician of a high order and also a theoretician of music. He anonymously compiled a music treatise titled *Sangita-Kalpataru*. He once corrected a friend saying: 'Mere tune and keeping time are not all of music. It must express an idea. Can anyone appreciate a song sung in a drawling manner? The idea underlying the song must arouse the feeling of the singer, the words should be articulated distinctly, and proper attention be given to tune and timing. The song that does not awaken a corresponding idea in the mind of the singer is not music at all' (1.39).

In accordance with the Maharaja's wish Kempegowda arrived one day and sang at the palace durbar. Swamiji, along with those present in the durbar, became enthralled and euphoric. After the singing Swamiji approached Kempegowda and blessed him. Encouraged by Swamiji's comment that Kempegowda is blessed by Goddess Saraswati and fit to be the court musician, the maharaja requested the singer to accept the post. But Kempegowda humbly declined and left. Later, after much persuasion by Vasudevacharya, the court musician who was Kempegowda's friend and brother-disciple, and also by other courtiers, he agreed to live near the palace and once in a while sing in the evening at the maharaja's request. The maharaja became increasingly captivated by Kempegowda's songs. One evening the singer arrived drunk, which gave his detractors an opportunity to vilify him before all. Chamarajendra Wadiyar too was displeased at such uncouth behaviour. But being used to Kempegowda's singing he did not abandon him completely. When the maharaja and his entourage were to visit Calcutta in 1895, the maharaja requested Kempegowda to accompany him. Kempegowda agreed. Unfortunately the maharaja passed away in Calcutta due to a serious illness. This was a second shock for Kempegowda.

Though the dewan and the maharani persuaded Kempegowda to accompany them to Mysore, he declined and left for the Himalayas, penniless.⁵

In 1897, while wandering in the Himalayas, Kempegowda heard that Swamiji was touring India and inspiring the nation. He rushed to Calcutta to meet Swamiji.⁶ Swamiji was happy to see him and asked Kempegowda to sing, which he did. Swamiji was overwhelmed by the song, and when it ended said in a voice choked with emotion that as he was a beggar, he had nothing to give, but offered Kempegowda his *gerua*, ochre, shirt. Kempegowda prostrated at Swamiji's feet and with tears prayed for sannyasa. Swamiji, however, assured him that he would attain the goal of human life by serving Mother Saraswati without having to take formal sannyasa.⁷

Till his death in 1937, Bhairavi Kempegowda stayed mostly in the vicinity of Bangalore, singing alone with his beautiful voice. 

References

1. See Vasudevacharya, *Na Kanda Kalavidaru* (Mysore: Kavyalaya Publishers, 1985), 110. Translations by the author.
2. See N Krishnaswami, 'Bhairavi Kempegowda Mattu Swami Vivekanandaru', *Vivekaprabha*, 5/3 (March 2004), 23.
3. Swami Vivekananda also warned the Maharaja: 'One day, in the presence of his courtiers, the Maharaja asked, "Swamiji, what do you think of my courtiers?" "Well, I think your Highness has a very good heart, but you are unfortunately surrounded by courtiers, and courtiers are courtiers everywhere!" His Eastern and Western Disciples, *The Life of Swami Vivekananda*, 2 vols (Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama, 2008), 1.322.
4. *The Life of Swami Vivekananda*, 1.322.
5. 'Bhairavi Kempegowda Mattu Swami Vivekanandaru', 24.
6. There is no mention or record of the place they met, but we can presume that it took place at Alambazar.
7. See *Na Kanda Kalavidaru*, 126.

Cyclic Cosmology and Vedanta

Rajeshwar Mukhopadhyaya

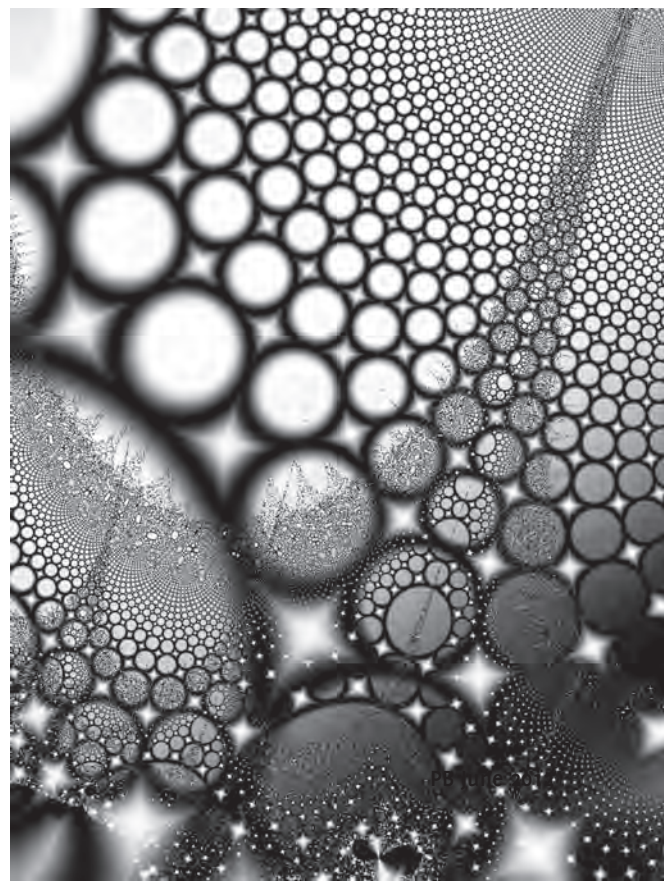
WHERE DO WE COME FROM and how did the universe come into being are questions that have engaged humanity from ancient times. The process of answering these questions has given rise to mythology, legends, stories, beliefs, and science. Much of what humanity thought for thousands of years is now discarded as rudimentary. But some ancient concepts are still relevant and alive because they were spoken from the depths of human experience. Recent cosmological theories are finding significant similarities in the towering philosophy of Vedanta. For instance, several eminent scientists have proposed that the nature of the universe is cyclic, which is a standard belief in Vedanta.

Modern Trend of Vedanta

Advaita Vedanta conceives of Brahman as the ultimate Reality and the world as an appearance. The modern phase of Advaita Vedanta owes much to the great master Sri Ramakrishna and his illustrious disciple Swami Vivekananda, who infused marvellous concepts into the lofty philosophy of Acharya Shankara and facilitated thus a synthesis between Vedanta and modern science. Sri Ramakrishna's concept of *nitya*-lila, the absolute and the relative, modestly restricts the concept of *satya-mithya*, truth and falsity, of Acharya Shankara and infuses a scientific temper into the philosophy of Vedanta. Swamiji says: 'What Ramakrishna Paramahansa and I have added to this [traditional Hindu and Buddhist teachings] is, that the Many and the One are the same Reality, perceived by the same mind at different times and in different attitudes.'¹ Acharya

Shankara taught absolute Consciousness as the only Reality and the world of manifoldness as mere appearance. Swami Vivekananda, accepting the vision of Shankara as cognizable only in the state of transcendence, admits the phenomenal reality and considers it as the lila of absolute Consciousness effected through the cosmic principle of *maya*. The masters termed the non-dual aspect of Brahman '*nitya*' and its world-aspect '*lila*'. *Nitya* refers to the ultimate Truth, whereas *lila* to the relative truth viewed with reference to the phenomenal world. *Nitya* is like water and *lila* like water's waves.

Swami Vivekananda wanted to demonstrate that there is a correlation between the Vedantic



concept of unity of existence and the latest discoveries of modern cosmology. In 1895, ten years before Albert Einstein's paper on the special theory of relativity, Swamiji proposed, in a lecture delivered in London, the unity of energy and matter: 'It is possible to demonstrate that what we call matter does not exist at all. It is a certain state of force.' This idea was later captured in Einstein's famous equation $E = mc^2$, in March 1905. In 1895 Swamiji anonymously contributed a paper to the *New York Medical Times* titled 'The Ether',² which drew the attention of Nikola Tesla, a renowned physicist of the time. Besides his significant contribution to the fields of electromagnetism, radar, wireless communications, and radio, Tesla was the first to discover the alternating current. Being charmed by the magnificent thoughts of Vedanta, Tesla ardently attended a few lectures delivered by Swami Vivekananda. He met Swamiji and cherished a desire to mathematically demonstrate the

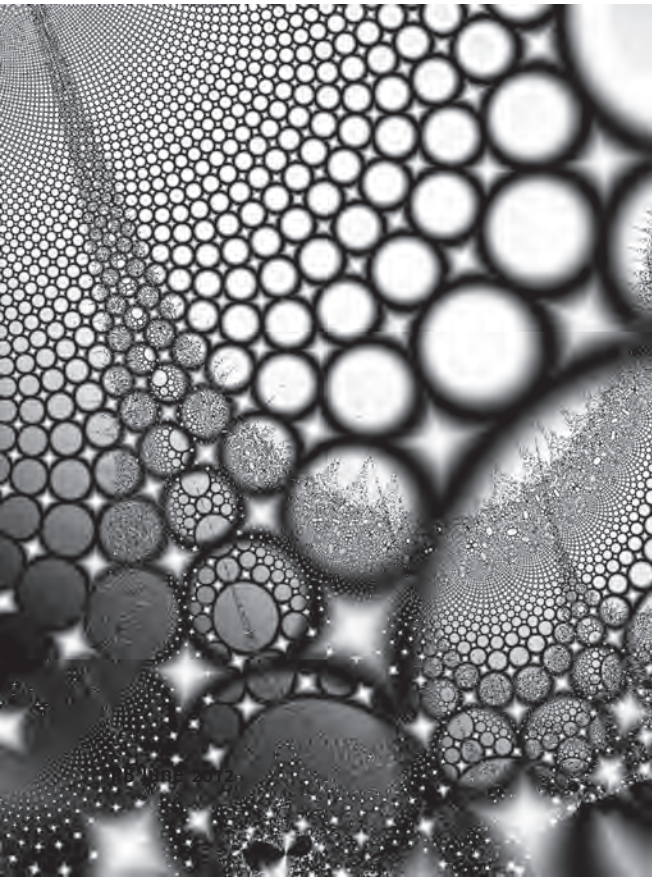
cosmology propounded in Vedanta, but unfortunately the confluence of the two masterminds did not run its full course.³

During those years the Cartesian division of mind and matter and the sovereignty of classical physics, which emphasizes objective investigation, made the subjective approach of Vedanta philosophy not easily acceptable. This was about to change with the uncertainty principle, the epoch-making discovery of Werner Heisenberg in the field of quantum mechanics. It resulted in a surge of subjectivity in physical sciences and dethroned classical physics. In their quest to understand the universe, scientists searching the quantum world were drawing closer to Vedanta philosophy. The Copenhagen interpretation of quantum mechanics,⁴ Bell's theorem,⁵ and Schrodinger's cat paradox impelled materialistic objectivity to die hard. Finally, Godel's theorem⁶ gave a massive final blow to the algorithmic approach to the search for truth. Thus, the speculations of Vedanta, which chiefly advocates the supremacy of subjectivity over objectivity, have become the linchpin in the quest for truth. Thanks to the rise of quantum physics and subjectivity, Vedantic cosmology as expounded by Swamiji has become relevant to the modern perspective.

Vedantic Cosmology

The Vedantic concept of creation is enshrined in the famous 'Nasadiya Sukta' of the Rig Veda,⁷ which is popularly known as the 'Hymn of Creation'. The Sukta is not merely a rare specimen of poetry but is permeated with profound philosophical insight regarding the creation of universe. The first two verses, translated by Swamiji, are:

Existence was not then, nor non-existence,
The world was not,
the sky beyond was neither.
What covered the mist? Of whom was that?
What was in the depths of darkness thick?



Death was not then, nor immortality,
 The night was neither separate from day,
 But motionless did *That* vibrate
 Alone, with Its own glory one—
 Beyond *That* nothing did exist.⁸

In their quest for the ultimate principle of the universe, the Vedic seers arrived at the profound truth that the primal cause of creation is beyond the limitations of name, form, space, and time; it is singular and transcendental in nature. This transcendental Reality has been hinted upon by these words in the Sukta: '*Tad ekam*; That one.' When the universe was undifferentiated, that non-dual Brahman remained united with its inscrutable power, *maya*. In the differentiated state, Vedanta declares, the phenomenal universe was projected into existence by the apparent modification, *vivarta*, of Brahman. *Maya* functions through its two powers of *avarana*, concealment, and *vikshepa*, projection. *Avarana* obscures and conceals the true nature of Brahman, while *vikshepa* creates the universe and all the objects through the process of evolution. *Maya* becomes the substratum of space, time, and causality. Brahman reflected in cosmic *maya* becomes Ishvara endowed with infinite attributes like omniscience, omnipotence, and immanence and is the creator, preserver, and destroyer of the universe. While interpreting the Sukta, Sayanacharya, the great Vedic commentator, teaches that Ishvara is the efficient as well as the material cause of the universe.

Brahman without qualities, *nirguna*, becomes Brahman with qualities, *saguna*, due to *maya*. The two aspects are also spoken of as transcendent Brahman and immanent Brahman. The first manifestation of Saguna Brahman is Ishvara. Some of the names of Saguna Brahman are Hiranyagarbha, Virat, Sutratman, and Prana. All these names denote the Cosmic Self, the Cosmic Mind, or the Cosmic Person. According to most Vedantists, Brahman conditioned by the

causal universe is called Ishvara, conditioned by the subtle universe is called Hiranyagarbha, and conditioned by the gross universe is called Virat.

Vedanta upholds the unceasing cyclic nature of cosmic evolution. The universe is not absolutely created or annihilated, it undergoes sequential transformation from the non-manifest to the manifest state through phases of periodic expansions and contractions, eternally. Swamiji explains:

Our Sanskrit word for creation, properly translated, should be *projection* and not *creation*. For the word creation in the English language has unhappily got that fearful, that most crude idea of something coming out of nothing, creation out of non-entity, non-existence becoming existence, which, of course, I would not insult you by asking you to believe. Our word, therefore, is projection. The whole of this nature exists, it becomes finer, subsides; and then after a period of rest, as it were, the whole thing is again projected forward, and the same combination, the same evolution, the same manifestations appear and remain playing, as it were, for a certain time, only again to break into pieces, to become finer and finer, until the whole thing subsides, and again comes out. Thus it goes on backwards and forwards with a wave-like motion throughout eternity. Time, space, and causation are all within this nature. To say, therefore, that it had a beginning is utter nonsense. No question can occur as to its beginning or its end. Therefore wherever in our scriptures the words beginning and the end are used, you must remember that it means the beginning and end of one particular cycle; no more than that (3.123).

At the end of a cycle of the universe everything becomes finer and finer and is resolved back into the primal undifferentiated state from where it emerged. This state has been described in the Sukta as *anidvatam*, 'it vibrated without vibration'.

At the commencement of a new cycle, under the cosmic spell of *maya*, the first element to appear in the potential universe is *akasha*, space. Space is acted upon by *prana*, force, vibration, and as the vibrations become faster, space commences to inflate and create all the world systems. *Akasha* is the one universal material from which everything has emerged, and *prana* is the one universal force. All forces found in the universe—call them electromagnetism, weak and strong nuclear forces, gravitation, heat, light, emotion, thought, attraction, repulsion—are vibrations, are *prana*. The universe is characterized by vibrations, and as long as vibrations continue, various names and forms emerge and merge, to again be recycled with new names and forms. Today science tells us that nothing is static in the universe, and that even ordinary space is dynamic.

Cyclic Universe

In the 1920s Edwin Hubble peered into his telescope atop Mount Wilson and changed the way we looked at the universe. He found billions of galaxies, thought of as stars, rushing away from each other. The universe is expanding. And from this observation came the theory of the Big Bang, which states that the material universe had its origin in a small and infinitely dense singularity that exploded, so to say. Matter flew in all directions, cooled, and clumped together through gravity. The discovery of the cosmic microwave background radiation validated the Big Bang theory, as it was found that this radiation was the leftover heat of the Big Bang. The Big Bang became scientific dogma.

Everything seemed perfect until other cosmological theorists brought a dazzling array of explanations that blew up the cosmological peace. The way matter is distributed all over the universe seems to be more the consequence of a smooth inflation than the after-effects of a

violent bang. Gravity, under certain conditions, may repel to produce a gigantic uniform expansion. Some theorists then proposed that the universe might not end in a big crunch, but it will reverse to a point of infinitely dense matter, whose own dense gravity will make it expand again. Whether the universe starts with a bang or by inflation, both theories imply that the universe is finite, which leads to the possibility of many universes, many Big Bangs. Cosmologists who applied quantum theories of non-locality and entanglement to cosmology came up with even more radical models. Today we can speak of an anti-universe, an alternate universe, or parallel universes, to the astonishment of many.

The model proposed by Paul J Steinhardt and Neil Turok as the alternative to the Standard Big Bang model is capable of explaining the whole host of physical observations in detail. According to their cyclic model, the evolution of the universe is cyclic in time, and the universe undergoes infinite cycles of expansion and contraction, in which the density and temperature remain finite.⁹ Being influenced by the string theory, the model successfully addresses the many loopholes of the Big Bang theory, which has long dominated the scientific world. As the *ex nihilo* creation proposed by the Big Bang model became untenable, the advocates of the cyclic universe propounded that space and time are infinite. An earlier theory of periodic universes underwent a massive setback when the second law of thermodynamics, called entropy, was put forward. Richard C Tolman, interested in applying thermodynamic principles to relativistic systems, pointed out that the total entropy of the universe goes on rising from one cycle to the next. He also found that as the entropy of the universe rises, the cycles grow bigger and bigger, as a result of which the universe ceases to be strictly cyclic. Again, despite a continued rise in entropy, the universe never reaches a thermodynamic

equilibrium, which is awfully strange.¹⁰ The cyclic model of Steinhardt and Turok properly addresses the conundrum, setting the theory free from discrepancies.¹¹ This model suggests that the entropy density has a perfect cyclic behaviour, with entropy density being created at each bang. The entropy density grows to attain a certain value and then decreases to a negligible level before the next bang. The paradigm of cosmology put forward by Steinhardt and Turok follows the Ekpyrotic scenario proposed by Justin Khoury, Burt Ovrut, and Nathan Seiberg, who stated that space and time being infinite, the universe undergoes sequential expansions and contractions, and the bang marks the transition from the contraction to the expansion phase.¹²

The cyclic theory propounds that the bang is followed by the direct entry into the radiation-dominated period. Then, as the universe enters the dark-energy-dominated region, the cosmic acceleration commences. Basically, the entire cyclic energy scenario is governed by the field of dark energy. Scientists suggest that the field of dark energy generates a phase of slow acceleration, converts acceleration into retardation, and subsequently contraction and reheating begin. Finally, the dark energy makes the universe end its contraction phase to start expansion again, triggering off another new cycle.


Swamiji reiterated that the universe undergoes a series of *vikasa*, expansion, and *sankocha*, contraction, in the course of its evolution. He says: 'There is another common ground of belief [among various philosophies in India]: that of creation in cycles, that the whole of creation appears and disappears; that it is projected and becomes grosser and grosser, and at the end of an incalculable period of time it becomes finer and finer, when it dissolves and subsides, and then comes a period of rest. Again it begins to appear and goes through the same process.'¹³

Vedanta conceives of the universe to be eternal as Ishvara, who is the *sakshi*, witness, and the controller. Being the cause of the universe Ishvara is infinite, and its effect, the universe, is also infinite. 'At one time, when Swamiji sat for meditation, there appeared before him a very large, wonderful triangle of light which, he felt, was living. One day he came to Dakshineswar and told the Master this, when the latter said, "Very good; you have seen the Brahmayoni; while practising Sadhana under the Vilva tree, I also saw it; what was more, I observed it giving birth to innumerable worlds every moment."'¹⁴ *Brahmayoni* is the womb of Brahman. The Bhagavadgita teaches: 'My womb is the great-sustainer. In that I place the seed. From that, O scion of the Bharata dynasty [Arjuna], occurs the birth of all things.'¹⁵

Vedanta considers that the universe is the manifestation of consciousness under the operation of maya. In Vedantic parlance the Big Bang can be said to be a 'bang of consciousness'. The *Aitareya Upanishad* declares: 'All these are impelled by Consciousness; all these have Consciousness as the giver of their reality; the universe has Consciousness as its eye and Consciousness is its end. Consciousness is Brahman.'¹⁶ Further, in the *Taittiriya Upanishad* a seer exclaims: 'That (Brahman) having created entered into that very thing. And having entered there, It became the formed and the formless, the defined and the undefined, the sustaining and the non-sustaining, the sentient and the insentient, the true and the untrue. Truth became all this that there is. They call that (Brahman) Truth.'¹⁷

The bang is, therefore, not creation out of nothing as proposed by the Big Bang theory, but it is the event through which the unmanifest universe becomes manifest—of course, the manifestation is of Consciousness. Echoing Vedanta philosophy, proponents of the cyclic model discard the concept of the origin of the universe

out of nothing and reiterate that the bang marks the transition from the contraction of the universe to its expansion. The cyclic theory suggests that tiny density variations, called ripples of the previous cycle, govern the growth and decay of the next cycle. *Akasha* and *prana* apparently correspond to all the universe's matter and energy respectively. *Prana*, being the substratum of all energy, produces a force-field that controls the evolution of the universe. This force-field, Ishvara's consciousness, intelligently administers the universe in all its stages. In his book *The Intelligent Universe*, the great astrophysicist Fred Hoyle admits that an intelligent principle has begotten the universe.¹⁸ Many modern scientists informally acknowledge that consciousness is a more fundamental substance or entity than any inanimate cause conceived till now. The Vedas declare: 'Afterwards the Ruler of sentient and non-sentient beings—who made day and night—ordained sun and moon, sky and earth, and atmosphere and blissful heaven, just as they were in the previous cycles of creation.'¹⁹

In the context of this article the hiatus between Vedanta and science also needs to be brought into focus. The period of the cycles proposed in Vedanta does not correspond to the predictions of modern science. On the other hand, the scientific theory of a cyclic universe has been developed without making any reference to consciousness, which Vedanta considers fundamental. 

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6. Any such precise 'formal' mathematical system of axioms and rules of procedure, provided that it is broad enough to contain descriptions of simple arithmetical propositions and that it is free from contradiction, must contain some statements that are neither provable nor disprovable by the means allowed within the system. The truth of such statements is thus 'undecidable' by the approved procedures. See 'Metalogic' in *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2009).
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Swami Vivekananda: Icon of Social Regeneration

Dr C M Bisha

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA EMPLOYED his vision, stupendous will power, and energy in igniting social regeneration in India at a time when the country was fast declining. Though Swamiji was a unique person given to deep meditation, he also displayed tremendous dynamism. Vedanta, as taught and lived by his master Sri Ramakrishna, became a living force in Swamiji; he tirelessly travelled and preached its principles all over the world. As a man of action Swamiji was the living embodiment of sacrifice, dedicating himself to India's uplift and inspiring others to take up this work. Social service was transformed in his hands by applying the highest principles of Vedanta. His method to bring about a new social order in India was based on the uplifting of the neglected masses through the innate spirituality of the nation.

Method of Renewal

Swamiji's great mission was 'to preach unto mankind their divinity and how to make it manifest in every movement of life.'¹ He saw divine potentiality in humankind and wanted everyone to be conscious of it and behave accordingly. This consciousness of the inner divinity constitutes pure spirituality and demands that people should treat all living beings as an end in themselves. Swamiji's approach to nationalism was a religious and spiritual one, divested of superstitions and outdated customs. The only way the masses in every country could be awakened is through a spiritual ideal,

and not just through palliative measures. He warned: 'If you give up that spirituality, leaving aside to go after the materialising civilization of the West, the result will be that in three generations you will be an extinct race; because the backbone of the nation will be broken, the foundation undermined, and the result will be annihilation all round' (3.153).

Swamiji travelled the length and breadth of India and was deeply moved to see the appalling poverty and backwardness of the masses. Swamiji declared that the real cause of India's downfall was the 'neglect of the masses' by the people higher up. Owing to centuries of oppression, the downtrodden masses had lost faith in their capacity to improve their lot. The immediate need was to provide food and other necessities to the hungry millions and then infuse into their minds faith in themselves. And this faith can come from the knowledge that the immortal Atman dwells in everyone, the high and the low, the learned and the ignorant, the rich and the poor. The awareness of the Atman would bring in the real dignity of humankind in full force. He saw that the masses cling to religion, in spite of poverty and misery, but they had never been taught the life-giving ennobling principles of Vedanta and how to apply them in practical life. Swamiji made this work his mission and encouraged others to emulate it by declaring:

Education, education, education alone! Travelling through many cities of Europe and observing in them the comforts and education of even

the poor people, there was brought to my mind the state of our own poor people, and I used to shed tears. What made the difference? Education was the answer I got. Through education comes faith in one's own Self, and through faith in one's own Self the inherent Brahman is waking up in them, while the Brahman in us is gradually becoming dormant (4.483).

Swamiji's plan of action was first to pull Indians back from their moribund condition, which was a result of *tamas*, darkness, lassitude. He preached intense activity and strength as the first step towards regenerating India. This activity would then take the form of 'renunciation and service' and 'work as worship'. As Swamiji wanted to reform society from its roots, his main concern was to awaken everyone and bring them into the mainstream of Indian life.

For centuries the masses were exploited. If nobody was there to reach out and help them, they had to help themselves to reach out to the national life-current and become nourished. This fusion of the 'other India' with the main body politic would bring in tremendous vitality as well as cultural and social regeneration. A successful nation requires that all citizens must be participants in its social, cultural, economic, and political activities. This requirement can be satisfied only by making the masses prepared for an effective commitment to a sense of unity in tune with the nation's cultural heritage. Swamiji was also aware of the growing influence of modern societies on India and wanted Indians to imbibe the best of them without unthinkingly imitating the worst. He warned those who run after the glitter:

There are two great obstacles on our path in India, the Scylla of old orthodoxy and the Charybdis of modern European civilisation. Of these two, I vote for the old orthodoxy, and not

for the Europeanised system; for the old orthodox man may be ignorant, he may be crude, but he is a man, he has a faith, he has strength, he stands on his own feet; while the Europeanised man has no backbone, he is a mass of heterogeneous ideas picked up at random from every source—and these ideas are unassimilated, undigested, unharmonised. He does not stand on his own feet, and his head is turning round and round (3.151).

Swamiji pointed out that evils were present in all societies, but no society should try to give up their national character. Social ills in India would be eradicated by her own people. He had deep concern for the emancipation of women from their age-old suppressions. He said: 'We are horrible sinners, and our degradation is due to our calling women "despicable worms", "gateways to hell", and so forth' (6.253). As a solution he affirmed that educating women would enable them to solve their own problems. Thus, evil in every section of society would be solved by each section. What he wanted to see was a society in which people enjoyed full freedom to realize the Atman. Swamiji said: '*That society is greatest, where the highest truths become practical*' (2.85). He further warned: '*Truth does not pay homage to any society, ancient or modern. Society has to pay homage to Truth or die*' (2.84).

Swamiji stressed the interdependence of members in society, and much of his writings and preaching were centred on humankind and society. If all the sections of society interacted properly, everyone would be automatically raised. He also emphasized the fact that behind the differences of creed, caste, and colour there lay the real person. With Vedanta as the basic philosophy of life and work, evils such as untouchability have no place or voice in society, nor can exploitation of women, children, poor, and illiterate be justified. There could not be any

form of tyranny, and the only solution was to serve and give others back their lost individuality. One can understand Swamiji's mind and heart through all these teachings: 'The poor, the low, the sinner in India have no friends, no help—they cannot rise, try however they may. They sink lower and lower every day, they feel the blows showered upon them by a cruel society, and they do not know whence the blow comes. They have forgotten that they too are men. And the result is slavery' (5.14).

Socialism, when Swamiji was alive, was being touted as the next great wave to sweep the world, but Swamiji's practical Vedanta was far superior to socialistic ideas. His gospel was based on the spiritual nature of humans and not on their material aspect. Thus, Swamiji's message was dynamic; he preached strength and fearlessness based on the Atman, which is human beings' true nature. He urged his followers to give the masses opportunities for their all-round development without injuring their religion, provide them with the right kind of education, consider untouchability a blot and remove it, cultivate material sciences, pay attention to technological and industrial development, encourage the rich to assist the suffering millions, give opportunities for the women to improve, and above all, to unshackle society for its onward movement. In his view, the lack of national and political awareness was also the cause of social inequalities in Indian society. He said: 'Educate our people, so that they may be able to solve their own problems. Until that is done all these ideal reforms will remain ideals only' (5.215). He also suggested that the superb ideas of the Vedas must become the common property of everyone; at the same time he encouraged Sanskrit education because the very sound of Sanskrit language brings in a sense of prestige, vitality, and strength to the race.

A New Social Order


Swamiji was a person with tremendous insight and vigour. His travels in India and the world had made his insights and vigour all the more powerful. When he spoke or wrote, he did it in the style of a prophet, with authority. The mission to regenerate India was initially thrust on him by his guru Sri Ramakrishna, who had moulded his chief disciple in this line for many years. Swamiji wanted to be immersed in *nirvikalpa* samadhi, but Sri Ramakrishna scolded him saying: 'Fie on you! You are such a highly qualified aspirant, and you speak like this! I took you to be a huge banyan tree under which thousands would find shelter, and here you are craving for personal emancipation.'² Swamiji later plunged himself heart and soul in the mission. His solutions to the many problems seemed radical, but after a hundred years they are found to be the best and abiding principles to work on. He said:

Most of the reforms that have been agitated for during the past century have been ornamental. Every one of these reforms only touches the two castes, and no other. The question of widow marriage would not touch seventy per cent of the Indian women, and all such questions only reach the higher castes of Indian people who are educated, mark you, at the expense of the masses. Every effort has been spent in cleaning their own houses. But that is no reformation. You must go down to the basis of the thing, to the very root of the matter. That is what I call radical reform.

He dreamt of a new social order through which people can attain salvation by themselves. To quote him: 'They are to be given ideas; their eyes are to be opened to what is going on in the world around them; and then they will work out their own salvation. Every nation, every man, and every woman must work

out their own salvation' (4.362). Uniting people is the primary condition for bringing a peaceful social revolution, therefore he stressed: 'Give them their rights and let them stand on their rights' (5.223-4).

Swamiji worked not by breaking things down as fanatics do, but by building things up. He kept the ancient concepts and character of India and yet looked far into the distant future. He never criticized India's religion, institutions, and castes, but he pointed out their inability to reach the heights they were ordained to reach: 'Before flooding India with sociological or political ideas, first deluge the land with spiritual ideas' (3.221). He only criticized India's selfishness, narrowness, and laziness.


Swamiji was a great patriot with a burning love for the motherland and a yearning for her freedom at all levels. But his name can never be confined to narrow nationalism. Swamiji stood for the liberation of the whole humankind and not for a particular section of society or a particular country. His concepts of nationalism and freedom represent a synthesis of Eastern and Western concepts. In his works one can find his vision of a new social order that includes modern ideas of equality, social awareness, and practical efficiency blended with gentleness and tolerance towards ancient traditions. The awakening and liberation of modern India, as viewed by him, was a stage for the realization of universal love and brotherhood. 

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(Continued from page 308)

Swamiji says:

The whole life of society is the assertion of that one principle of freedom. All movements are the assertion of that one freedom. That voice has been heard by everyone, whether he knows it or not, that voice which declares, 'Come unto Me all ye that labour and are heavy laden.' It may not be in the same language or the same form of speech, but in some form or other, that voice calling for freedom has been with us. Yes, we are born here on account of that voice; every one of our movements is for that. We are all rushing towards freedom, we are all following that voice, whether we know it or not; as the children of the village were attracted by the music of the flute-player, so we are all following the music of the voice without knowing it.¹⁸ 

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Vivekananda and His Seafaring Vessels

Somenath Mukherjee

(Continued from the previous issue)

SS Numidian

BUILT IN 1891 by D & W Henderson Ltd of Glasgow the *Numidian* was a 4,836 gross ton ship.⁷⁷ She had a length of 400 feet and a width of 45.2 feet. The ship had a straight stem with one funnel and two masts with a single screw. Having a speed of thirteen knots the *Numidian* could accommodate 1,180 passengers—a hundred in first class, eighty in second class, and a thousand in steerage or third class. The ship belonged to the Montreal Ocean Steamship Company, more popularly known as the Allan Line, which was established in 1854. The *Canadian*, the first vessel of the Montreal Ocean Steamship Company, in its maiden voyage sailed from Liverpool on 16 September 1854, reaching Quebec on 28 September. Hugh and Andrew Allan, two partners of the company, had shipping in their blood. They were the second and fourth of the five sons of Alexander [Sandy] Allan (1780–1854), who in 1819 came into the shipping business and is considered among the forerunners of transatlantic voyages.

The Allan Line continued in business till about 1911, when negotiations began to merge it with the Canadian Pacific Line. This finally happened in 1915 and the Canadian Pacific Ocean Services Limited was born. However, the official announcement of the merger was withheld till 1917. Before the merger took place the Glasgow-New York voyage of the Allan Line came to a close, and the *Numidian* left Glasgow for New York for the last time on 28 September 1905. The *New York Times* of 27 September writes: ‘The Allan Line’s Glasgow-New York service will be suspended

temporarily at least after the sailing of the *Numidian* from Glasgow tomorrow. A circular sent out to agents and shippers says that in consequence of the expiration of the lease of their New York pier and inability to arrange for renewal or secure other suitable accommodation, they are obliged to suspend the service.’⁷⁸ Pier rentals were reportedly becoming exorbitant and the company welcomed the termination of the lease. The main reason, however, was the low profitability of the route and receding prospects in the wake of the second series of large twin-screw steamers of rival lines.

Following the termination of her Glasgow-New York route, the *Numidian* took up the Glasgow-Quebec-Montreal voyage on 21 April 1906. This was succeeded by the Glasgow to Montreal, Boston, or Philadelphia route during 1906–14. In 1906 the ship was downgraded due to the suspension of her first class accommodation and she began to carry passengers only in second and third classes. Following her last Glasgow-Quebec-Montreal-Glasgow voyage on 24 November 1914, the *Numidian* was sold to the British Admiralty, who finally filled her with cement and sunk her as a blockship.⁷⁹

The Journey

Accompanied by Swami Turiyananda and the two Detroit ladies, Swami Vivekananda left London on a train to Glasgow on 16 August 1899. The *Numidian* awaited them for the transatlantic voyage to New York on the following day. It was a smooth and unhazardous voyage that proved



St Enoch's Station, Glasgow, Scotland (between c.1890 and c.1900)

unforgettable to Mary C Funke and Christine Greenstidel. The former recorded it for posterity:

There were ten never-to-be forgotten days spent on the ocean. Reading and exposition of the *Gita* occupied every morning, also reciting and translating poems and stories from Sanskrit and chanting old Vedic hymns. The sea was smooth and at night the moonlight was entrancing. Those were wonderful evenings; the Master paced up and down the deck, a majestic figure in the moonlight, stopping now and then to speak to us of the beauties of Nature. 'And if all this *Māyā* is so beautiful, think of the wondrous beauty of the Reality behind it!' he would exclaim.⁸⁰

But none can deny that though accompanying the swami in the confined space of a ship was the rarest of fortunes that one could only dream of, his companions had also the capacity

to imbibe and express such experience: 'One especially fine evening when the moon was at the full and softly mellow and golden, a night of mystery and enchantment, he stood silently for a long time drinking in the beauty of the scene. Suddenly he turned to us and said, "Why recite poetry when there," pointing to sea and sky, "is the very essence of poetry?"' (34–5).

With a faint sad note Mary C Funke ended her narrative: 'We reached New York all too soon, feeling that we never could be grateful enough for those blessed, intimate ten days with our guru' (35).

The Interlude

The Allan State Line's *Numidian* reached New York, with Swamiji on board, early morning on Monday, 28 August, almost three hours behind schedule. Three persons were at the docks to



East River docks, Manhattan, New York City (c.1900)

receive Swamiji: Maud Stumm, an artist in her late twenties; Mrs Mary B Coulston, treasurer of the New York Vedanta Society; and a Mr Sydney Clarke who, at the behest of Maud, had made himself available to look after the incoming luggage of the swamis. Since no mention has hitherto been available about Mary C Funke and Christine's destination on their arrival in New York, it is assumed that they had gone to their own addresses. Maud, however, had come all the way from Ridgely, around ninety miles from New York, to receive the swamis.

The swamis were taken to Ridgely on the same day after a brief stopover at the New York house of Francis Leggett. Based on her first look at Swamiji at the port, Maud later wrote: 'He was tired and ill-looking.' And we know that she hardly exaggerated what she noticed. Notwithstanding his ill health, what followed during the

next two and a half months at Ridgely is one of the brightest periods in Swamiji's life. Narrating her matchless experience of living in close proximity with the swami during that period at Ridgely, Maud later wrote: 'The days that followed! The air of freedom seemed to do him good—and such talks, such wonderful sermons! With his flame-coloured robes draped about him, what a figure he was as he strode the lawns of Ridgely! His stride came nearer to the poet's description of a "step that spurned the earth" than anything I ever expect to see again; and there was a compelling majesty in his presence and carriage that could not be imitated or described.'⁸¹

The abrupt news from Mrs S K Blodgett about Taylor Macleod, brother of Josephine and Betty, being seriously ill in Los Angeles made Josephine rush to the west coast. As she was

leaving Swamiji said to her: 'Get up some classes and I will come.'⁸² The swami arrived in California and stayed there for about six months, carrying his message to far and perhaps fertile fields. There he changed the lives of many people. Two instances will be indicative of the swami's stature during his unmatched phase in western US. Based on the first-hand experience of some witnesses, Marie Louise Burke narrates an incident on a hilltop during an informal picnic in which the swami's companions

felt themselves lifted into another level of existence altogether—a level in which they surely caught the 'Divine Fire' that blazed in their midst. 'When he had talked for some time,' Mrs Hansbrough said, 'the air would become surcharged with a spiritual atmosphere.' And she spoke on one occasion in particular when, absorbed in some subject he was discussing, 'he talked for six hours without interruption—from ten in the morning until four in the afternoon.' 'The air,' she said, 'was just vibrant with spirituality by the time it was over' (5.258).

Swami Ashokananda, a monk of the Ramakrishna Order who worked uninterruptedly in the same area from 1931 to 1969, met many people who had interacted with Swamiji. Ashokananda's views were expressed in a lecture on 7 January 1946: 'San Francisco is a special city; San Franciscans certainly always think so; but I really do think this city is especially blessed in being the locale where Swami Vivekananda taught things which he did not teach with the same strength, openness and decisiveness anywhere else.'⁸³

Leaving California on 30 May 1900 Swamiji reached New York on 7 June, following an interim rest of four days in Chicago. On 3 July he left for Detroit, where he stayed at Christine Greenstidel's house before returning again to New York on 10 July. Swami Vivekananda sailed for Paris on 26 July, leaving the US forever. He

was invited to attend the Congress of the History of Religions, which was part of the Paris Exposition, scheduled to be held from 3 to 8 September 1900. Swamiji was not exactly keen to leave New York, though he was not, one may presume, altogether averse to it either. In his letter to Swami Abhedananda of 24 July one finds the reason that prompted him to choose his date: 'I would have gladly remained here but *sastay kisti mat* ["I have been lucky"]—got a fine berth, one room all to myself on a fine vessel. As soon as August comes it will be [a] terrible *vir* ["crowd"] as the companies are reducing the price.'⁸⁴

With Swami Vivekananda on board, the SS *Champagne* left New York on Thursday, 26 July for Le Havre.

(To be continued)

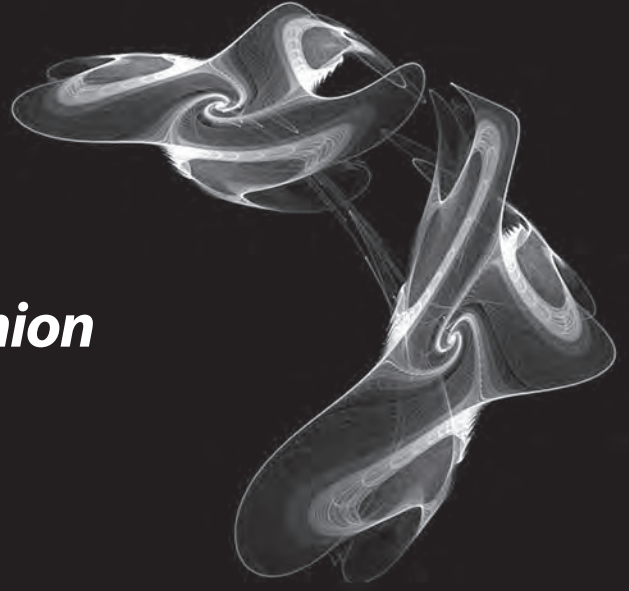
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Svarajya Siddhih: Attaining Self-dominion

Gangadharendra Saraswati

(Continued from the previous issue)



OBJECTION: Cannot it be presumed that persons like Janaka had taken sannyasa in their previous births and underwent sadhana like listening, cogitating, and meditating [on Upanishadic truths] but could not attain knowledge due to some obstructions, and that in this birth they were freed from all impediments and attained knowledge immediately on listening to the scriptures? It is also said in the Bhagavadgita: ‘By that previous practice alone, he is carried forward, even in spite of himself’;²² and ‘gradually gaining perfection through many births, [the yogi] thereby reaches the highest goal’ (6.45).

Reply: By these [shlokas] sannyasa alone is clearly referred to. *Vividiṣā sanṇyāsa*, sannyasa by the seeker, is mentioned in the scriptures: ‘Brahma Hiranyagarbha considers that sannyasa is the means of liberation. Hiranyagarbha is indeed the Supreme. The Supreme alone is Hiranyagarbha. Certainly [all] these [preceding] austerities set forth above are inferior. Sannyasa alone surpassed all.’²³ And also: ‘Having attained immortality, consisting of identity with the Supreme, all those aspirants who strive for self-control, who have rigorously arrived at

the conclusion taught by the Vedānta through direct knowledge, and who have attained purity of mind through the practice of the discipline of yoga and steadfastness in the knowledge of Brahman preceded by renunciation, get themselves released into the region of Brahman at the dissolution of their final body’ (12.15). *Vidvat sanṇyāsa*, sannyasa by the knower of Brahman, is also spoken of in the scriptures: ‘Knowing this very Self the brahmanas renounce the desire for sons, for wealth, and for the worlds, and lead a mendicant’s life.’²⁴ Some scriptural passages also talk of *krama sanṇyāsa*, sannyasa by order, that is sannyasa after completing the other three stages of life—Brahmacharya, Grihastha, and Vanaprastha: ‘After completing the period of Brahmacharya, one may become a householder, after being a householder one may become a Vanaprastha, and after completing the period of Vanaprastha, one may renounce.’²⁵ Some other passages speak of sannyasa not following the stages sequentially or sannyasa arising out of tremendous dispassion: ‘Verily one who has realised the (true) import of the Vedas may give up those things (previously enumerated) after the investiture with the holy thread,

or he may do so even before that ceremony— (give up) his father, son, his sacrificial fires, and the holy thread, his works, his wife, and all else that he may possess.²⁶

After the discussion of many passages from the Shrutis and Smritis, it is established that the only way to liberation is knowledge [of the Atman] and that sannyasa is the means of such knowledge. However, those who are not fortunate to have a teacher following in the tradition of seers, have different ideas of liberation due to their wrong reading of the Shrutis and Smritis. This is similar to the parable of the elephant and the four blind men so beautifully narrated by Sri Ramakrishna: 'Once some blind men chanced to come near an animal that someone told them was an elephant. They were asked what the elephant was like. The blind men began to feel its body. One of them said the elephant was like a pillar; he had touched only its leg. Another said it was like a winnowing-fan; he had touched only its ear. In this way the others, having touched its tail or belly, gave their different versions of the elephant. Just so, a man who has seen only one aspect of God limits God to that alone. It is his conviction that God cannot be anything else.'²⁷ Thus, different people have different understanding of the scriptures and take to wrong paths for liberation. On account of their intense attachment to worldly relations, like wife and children, they are unable to take sannyasa. The succeeding three verses denounce such people who consider actions to be the means of liberation and establish that knowledge alone is the means of liberation.

केचित्कर्मैव काम्योज्झितमुदितपदप्राप्त्युपायं प्रतीता
स्तच्चोपास्ति च मुक्तौ मिलितमथ
परे साधनं संगिरन्ते ।
अन्येतु ज्ञानकर्मोभयमिति मतिभिः स्वाभिरुतरेक्षमाणाः
ज्ञानादेवेति वाक्याद्वयमिह सहसा
नाऽनुमन्यामहे तान् ॥ ८ ॥

Some [a group of followers of Kumarila Bhatta and followers Prabhakara] are convinced that performing actions [*nitya* and *naimittika*] without desires is the means of liberation. Others [followers of Bhartriprapancha and Bhaskara] say that the performance of both actions and worship [of *prana* and so on] are means of liberation. Some others [another group of followers of Kumarila Bhatta] believe that both actions and knowledge are means of liberation. They hold on to their own opinions [giving up the meaning of the Vedas and the path shown by teachers who have the mystic knowledge of the Self]. [Because of the presence of Shruti passages like] 'Through knowledge alone [liberation is attained]', we will not readily accept their opinions [regarding the means of liberation].

Now, let us see the opinion of a group of the followers of Kumarila Bhatta and the followers of Prabhakara, who are the first group spoken of in this verse. The first sutra of the *Mimamsa Sutra* is: '*Athāto dharma jijñāsa*; next therefore (comes) the enquiry into dharma.'²⁸ Jaimini proceeds with the enquiry of the duty enjoined in the Vedas and their results. In the next sutra he says: '*Chodanālakṣaṇo'rtho dharmah*; dharma is that which is indicated by (known by means of) the Veda as conducive to the highest good' (1.1.2). Here the primacy of Vedic injunction is established by the definition of dharma. Later Jaimini says: '*Tadbhūtānām kriyārthena sāmāmnāyo'rthasya tannimittatvāt*; (in the sentence) there is only a predication (or mention) of words with definite denotations along with a word denoting an action, as the meaning (of the sentence) is based upon that (the meaning of the words)' (1.1.25). In the second chapter Jaimini puts forth the view of the *pūrvapakṣa*, opponent: '*Āmnāyasya kriyārthatvād-ānarthakya-ma-tadarthānām tasmād-anityamucyate*; (objection) the purpose of the Veda lying in the enjoining of actions,

those parts of the Veda which do not serve that purpose (like passages of praise) are useless, in these therefore the Veda is declared to be non-eternal (unreliable)' (1.2.1). This objection is quashed later: '*Vidhinātv-ekavākyatvāt-stutyarthena vidhīnam syuh*'; being construed along with injunction they (Vedic passages of praise) would serve the purpose of commending those injunctions' (1.2.7). Thus, the texts that eulogise and are called *arthavāda* have been considered to be parts of the injunctive texts, because both kinds of texts have the same intention of impelling one to action. In this manner, the authority of the entire Vedas in stipulating injunctions and prohibitions for actions to be done and actions to be avoided is established.

Vedic passages dealing with the Atman distinguished by a sense of doer-ship, and the like, and inducing a person to do actions and giving a picture of the fruits to be enjoyed from performing such actions by a qualified person; or passages that talk of the Atman associated with the performance of actions like a yajna are considered authoritative according to a group of Kumarila Bhatta's followers and Prabhakara's followers. Since Vedic passages known as Vedānta speak of the unattached, unaffected Atman and do not induce one to perform actions, how can they be held to be authoritative? Further, such meaning of the Vedic passages cannot be upheld because it is in conflict with the meaning of the passages in the earlier portions of the Vedas. When an adult listens to the sentence 'bring a pot', the person brings a pot. Seeing this, a child is convinced that this sentence is the cause of the action of bringing the pot and that the inducement to perform such action is brought about only by hearing this sentence and by nothing else. Thus, the child understands the relation between the sentence and the inducement to perform a particular action. Therefore, when the

child later listens to the sentence 'take away the pot, bring a cow', it understands the meaning by the method of insertion of words, *āvāpa*, and removal of words, *udvāpa*. This has been explained clearly in the argument of Prabhakara's followers presented by Gangesha in his Nyaya treatise *Tattvachintamani*:

The child, hearing A say 'Bring the pot' to B, sees that B brings a pot. Thus, he begins by observing B's specific activity. The child next seeks the cause of B's activity and concludes that the cause of that activity is B's understanding that a pot is to be brought (not knowledge in general, which is irrelevant). But he cannot distinguish the different meanings of the specific words used by A. These he learns by a process of assimilation (*āvāpa*) and discrimination (*udvāpa*). First he observes bringing, and a pot, and assumes there are words for these in what was said. Then he may hear another speech 'bring the book', and finds someone bringing a book. Likewise he hears 'remove the book' and observes a different activity. In this way he learns to distinguish the different meanings of the constituent parts of the speech acts.²⁹

The Mimamsa point of view of the process of learning the meaning of words has been lucidly explained by a recent scholar:

Language learning (*vyutpatti*) occurs in two stages: one for children, to whom language is introduced for the first time, and the other for adults. Children learn words and their meanings when adults, without using complete sentences, communicate to them through non-verbal means, such as by frequently pointing to objects in the external world. Physical surroundings or contexts provide learning situations for children. ... It is called the ostensive method. But it is to be noted that at this stage, although children are provided only physical contexts, on interpretation we find that the sentential contexts, too, are present in inexplicit form.

Of course, by means of ostension a word can be used in isolation. But when we utter the word 'cow' in the presence of a child and point to an object 'cow' sensibly present there, the child's understanding is in the form 'this is a cow'. It is true that the child is not able to express understanding in a syntactically correct and complete sentence. Mimamsa, in general, will never accept that a child learns the meaning of a word by the ostensive method, for when we simultaneously utter a word and point to an object in the child's presence, it is never clear what we want to convey. Instead of understanding a sound-sequence, say 'cow', to stand for an object 'cow', the child may understand it to mean anything seen in the physical context there, for example, the child's understanding may be in any of the following forms: 'this object is red', 'this object is hard', 'this object is static', and so on. There is every likelihood that the child will understand by this method any one of the properties of the object, rather than the object as a whole, that is, including its substance, attributes, and relations. Therefore, the only possible and correct way of learning the meaning of a word, says Mimamsa, is in the context of a sentence followed by a physical act.³⁰

The different stages of the understanding of the meaning have been explained:

Prabhakarans give the account of the language-learning situation as follows. A child learns the meanings of words by the method of inclusion (avapa, anvaya, pratisthapana) and elimination (udvapa, vyatireka, visthapana), through hearing the linguistic usage of one person followed by the physical behavior of another. The child's learning becomes easier when sentences are in the imperative mood, because this usage proves to be the most effective means for accomplishing this purpose. From the utterance of an imperative sentence, such as 'bring a cow', and the subsequent fulfillment of obedience-conditions (pravrtti), and again, the utterance of another imperative

sentence 'bring a horse' and the subsequent fulfillment of obedience-conditions, a child learns the meanings of the words, 'cow', 'horse', and 'bring' by eliminating the word 'cow' from the first sentence and including another word 'horse', in the second sentence.

In other words, when a child (who is neutral, *tatastha*) watches an elder (*prayojakavrdha*, *uttamavrdha*, one who gives a command) giving a command to another elder (*prayojyavrdha*, *madhyamavrdha*, one who obeys the command), as in the example above, and when the same process is repeated again and again in the case of other similar commands, the child learns the meanings of the words that occur in the uttered sentences through a method of elimination and inclusion of the words involved. This process of learning is unconscious and natural.

Prabhakara would say that we can talk in general of word meanings in isolation where the sentential context is inexplicit, but a word gets its specific and actual meaning, and is infused with designative power, only in the context of the sentence in which it occurs.

For Mimamsa, the empirical world is the foundation of truth conditions on the basis of which the construction of sentences is done. In other words, the structure of language in general coincides with the structure of the world. Empirical sentences (of course, meaningful) in any mood contain object-words that have their corresponding counterparts, for which they stand. In the ultimate analysis, each word in its atomic form refers to a fact, a state of affairs. That is how our understanding of a sentence, irrespective of its mood, is possible (*ibid.*).

Thus, the true meaning of words is understood and the proper action is performed, and the power of the words to induce one to perform actions is also established. The authority of the words of the Vedas is established only because they induce the performance of actions. Actions alone lead to liberation. A contrary view will go

In the universe, Brahma or Hiranyagarbha or the cosmic Mahat first manifested himself as name, and then as form, i.e. as this universe. All this expressed sensible universe is the form, behind which stands the eternal inexpressible Sphota, the manifestor as *Logos* or Word. This eternal Sphota, the essential eternal material of all ideas or names is the power through which the Lord creates the universe, nay, the Lord first becomes conditioned as the Sphota, and then evolves Himself out as the yet more concrete sensible universe. This Sphota has one word as its only possible symbol, and this is the ॐ (Om). And as by no possible means of analysis can we separate the word from the idea this Om and the eternal Sphota are inseparable; and therefore, it is out of this holiest of all holy words, the mother of all names and forms, the eternal Om, that the whole universe may be supposed to have been created.

—*The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 3:57

against Shruti and Smriti texts, which is insignificant. Since the Vedanta passages do not induce performance of actions, they are like a desert in the Vedas. This is the opinion of the first group.

Now, we see the opinion of the second group, the followers of Bhartriprapancha and Bhaskara. They believe that the purport of the Vedas is the performance of actions alone. In the beginning of the Vedas physical actions are spoken of, and in the Upanishads mental actions in the form of worship are spoken of. Further, here and there, the Vedas clearly give injunctions for the worship of Prana and the like. Numerous Vedic statements like, ‘The Self alone is to be meditated upon’,³¹ ‘One should meditate only upon the world of the Self’ (1.4.15), ‘There are two kinds of knowledge to be acquired’,³² and ‘Know it to be established in the intellect (of

the enlightened ones)’³³ give injunctions to attain Self-knowledge. Therefore, wherever Vedic passages are not explicit about Self-knowledge, like ‘thou art That’ or ‘I am Brahman’, the words ‘is to be meditated upon’ have to be introduced and the meaning of meditation or worship leading to knowledge has to be understood as the injunction of the Vedas. Vedic passages like ‘He who knows it thus and he who does not know, both perform actions with it. For knowledge and ignorance are different (in their results). Whatever is performed with knowledge, faith, and meditation becomes more effective’³⁴ establish the conjunction, the *samuccaya* of worship and actions. The Vedic statement ‘He who meditates only upon the world called the Self never has his work exhausted’³⁵ contradicts the loss of results for actions done coupled with knowledge, and so the conjunction of actions and worship, *upāsana-karma samuccaya*, is the means of liberation. This is the opinion of the second group.

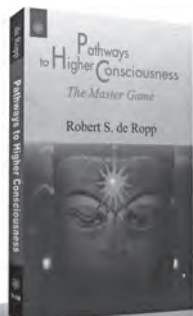
(To be continued)

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REVIEWS

For review in PRABUDDHA BHARATA,
publishers need to send **two** copies of their latest publications



Pathways to Higher Consciousness: The Master Game

Robert S de Ropp

New Age Books, A-44 Naraina Industrial Area, Phase I, New Delhi 110 028. Website: www.newagebooksindia.com. 2011. 250 pp. ₹ 295.

A clear perception and elevated consciousness can impart fulfilment to discerning individuals and spiritual seekers. This book explores the human psyche while offering distinct techniques through which persons can achieve high levels of consciousness. The exploration involves every aspect of the human personality: instinctive, motor, emotional, and intellectual. In the words of the author, such an exploration is 'the only game worth playing' (11). Robert S de Ropp was a laboratory scientist attracted to study the phenomena of consciousness. According to him, the lowest on the scale is art, next comes science for knowledge, religion follows, and finally the 'master game' for awakening consciousness. De Ropp terms the entire process of exploration as 'creative psychology', which culminates in an inner-directed person released from the thralldom of the mind and circumstances. The author is of the opinion that this process can be achieved through intentional efforts.

To persuasively put forward his thesis, the author offers a synthesis of certain ideas derived from history, anthropology, contemporary psychology, psycho-pharmacology, medicine, as well as Eastern and Western spirituality. When the book was first published in the US, during the post-war baby generation, it sold more than 200,000 copies.

The book has ten chapters. In 'Games and Aims' the author explains the master game played in the inner world, which uncovers latent powers

within oneself and leads to spiritual awakening. The second chapter deals with psychedelic drugs, their effects, and altered states of consciousness. Drugs do not expand consciousness but distort it. The third chapter describes five levels of consciousness: dreamless sleep, sleep with dreams, waking sleep, self-remembering, and cosmic consciousness. These five levels describe the theoretical basis of the teaching of creative psychology. Chapter four, titled 'The Silent Word', explains for practitioners of creative psychology certain procedures such as stopping thoughts, attention, handling impressions, the freedom to choose reactions, differences between intentional and mechanical doing, and repetition of mantras. The fifth chapter 'The Theatre of Selves' describes the popular method of spiritual seeking: the power of observing internal states to obtain control. The author also presents concepts of inner and outer theatre. Inner directed activity occurs whenever a person arrests some mechanical reaction and performs an intentional action. In the next chapter concepts of 'essence', 'persona', and 'ego' as well as William Sheldon's classification of body types and temperaments are discussed in a unique method. The author also points to the resemblance of these classifications with the four ashramas, stages of life, of Hindu society and also with the three *gunas*—*sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas*—taught in Indian philosophy. The next two chapters talk of 'educating' psychic centres and the link between creative psychology and mental health. The author proposes in the ninth chapter a creative community, thoughtfully weighing the pros and cons of leading meaningful lives in such a setting, to develop higher consciousness. He advocates striking a balance between an active and a contemplative life. In the tenth chapter ideas on death are presented. The discussion is rather perfunctory and does not do much justice to the all-important subject.

The book offers an opportunity to see our own psychological dependence on numerous objects and presents methods that help for psychological integration. For those who are ready the master game offers a scope, like an adventure, to seriously approach spiritual awakening.

Dr Chetana Mandavia

Professor of Plant Physiology,
Junagadh Agricultural University



***Mysticism across Cultures:
Studies on Select
Poets and Saints***

A N Dhar

Atlantic Publishers and Distributors,
7/22 Ansari Road, Darya Ganj, New
Delhi 110 002. Website: www.atlanticbooks.com. 2009. xiii + 206 pp.
₹ 495.

The author, former head of the department of English, University of Kashmir, offers in this book a remarkable study. Basically, mysticism and poetry are 'strange bedfellows', as Coventry Patmore, who figures in this study, calls it. But as a student of English literature, with exposure to related areas such as aesthetics and linguistics as also translation work, the author's basic stance is—or so it seems—that literature is the only possible vehicle for articulating mystical states of inexpressible experience.

The scrupulous loyalty to both experience and expression, without privileging either, seems to be the unique quality of this study. The contents of the book range from sublime divinity right down to people inspired to attempt expression of their experiences. There is a chapter on Sri Krishna and his way of love—with, naturally, Radha and Mirabai as exemplars of mystical love—including references to, among others, the classic *Gita Govinda* of Jayadeva. The initial essay, after an illuminating and crisp introduction to the subject, is naturally on *Lalla Vaakh*, sayings of Lal Ded, the mystic poet of Kashmir who remains a nucleus, as it were, of this study—the author has devoted another chapter to 'A Re-appraisal of Lal Ded'.

Professor Dhar provides relevant texts of the mystic poets he covers in both their originals and his own translations. He convincingly establishes that there is a commonality among apparently different affiliations. For instance, he points out that there is substantially no distinction between Kashmir Shaivism and Acharya Shankara's Vedanta. Taking cognizance of critics, like Professor Jayalal Kaul, who insist on such distinctions, Professor Dhar shows that both philosophies are rooted in the Vedas and are complementary to each other. Thus, this study has the striking feature of both *samanvaya*, convergence, and *samarasya*, congruence: showing connection as intrinsically unique aspects in any manifestation of human creativity. The author cites Sri Ramakrishna to illustrate 'nature' mysticism, which is not at variance with the 'sense of wonder' that threw Sri Ramakrishna into ecstasy when he was struck by the beauty of a host of cranes flying high in the sky. This is compatibility between the fine arts and spirituality. Similarly, the mystical phase of the 'dark night of the soul' is an experience comparable to Sri Ramakrishna's 'experience of extreme mortification'.

These delicately poised comparisons fill the book with a breath of fresh air of integral mysticism. Dhar offers autonomous studies of individual minstrels of God in chapters that deal with Shams Faqir, Bhavani Pandit, and Nunda Rishi. But it is comparative evaluation that he strikes with characteristic inwardness and freshness. There is also a feature that is rare in studies of this nature: the incorporation of inter-texts. While it is natural to use, for comparative purposes, Indic textual traditions to illumine Western texts, Dhar shows that there is tremendous potential in the Indic inter-textual traditions themselves. He illustrates this in his study of Bhavani Pandit's poetry saying that 'we have enough evidence in the book of what in the modern critical parlance is described as inter-textuality—we especially find specific lines and phrases from Lal Ded and Shams Faqir integrated into the text' (164–5). Professor Dhar rightly says: 'The hall-mark of good poetry is *flow*' (165). However, there is also need to think of a kind of cosmic consciousness with its own inexpressible but felt lows and

highs of mystical experiences and their articulation. This is an area that ought to be explored further as a common creative component of the current global ethos.

The author comes close to these aspects especially in his assessments of St John of the Cross and Swami Govind Kaul. The two paths of the positive and the negative find a balance that is manifest in both the *fana*, annihilation, of the Sufis and the *shunya*, void, of the Buddhists. There are also voices that strike out a solitary path within the tradition. These voices enrich themselves by other traditions, but do not get smothered by them, especially in terms of languages. Dhar rightly points to the striking feature of Shams Faqir's poem, whose diction is basically Kashmiri and yet employs Persian, Arabic, and Sanskrit words.

Though tangential, another refreshing chapter is on the poetry of Coventry Patmore, which has suffered undeserving neglect. Patmore's description of mysticism as the science of 'ultimates' opens up almost a comprehensive perspective for any study in this area. Especially significant are Dhar's comments on the erotic poetry of Patmore. We have here the naughty question: whether mystical poetry of love is actually disguised and often naked sexuality in words. Patmore was aware of this, but as Dhar shows he was too explicit in his articulation of passion. This aspect seems subject to the risk that Francis Thomson, quoted by Dhar, notes: 'I am too concrete and intelligible, I fear greatly lest what I have written may not do more harm than good by exposing divine realities to profane apprehension' (61).

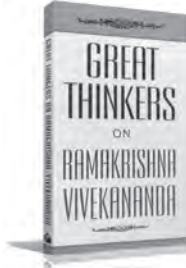
In effect, Professor Dhar's study not only illustrates the vitality of intercultural and multilingual dimensions of mystical poetry but also draws attention to its interconnections. However, he has left his exploration of T S Eliot's *Four Quartets* somewhat incomplete. He could have benefited from full-length studies of the presence of Indic literary and philosophical traditions in Eliot, which show enduring ways of balancing aspects of apparently varied traditions. Here it is not *samanvaya* but *samarasya* that is needed.

With its elegant translations of originals and

its introduction to mystical poets who are not widely known, *Mysticism across Cultures* remains an indispensable sourcebook. As such, it is a pioneering study.

Dr M Sivaramkrishna

Former Head, Department of English,
Osmania University, Hyderabad



Great Thinkers on Ramakrishna Vivekananda

Ramakrishna Mission Institute of
Culture, Gol Park, Kolkata 700 029.
Website: www.sriramakrishna.org.
2009. xiii + 210 pp. ₹ 60.

Prophets need no testimonies, but only great minds can recognize greatness. The diverse impressions on great people of a prophet's greatness give a different dimension of these luminaries, which we missed with our superficial observation. The book documents the sublime and deep thoughts of great people worldwide on Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda. While some had the privilege of meeting these divine personages, others have been deeply influenced by their life and teachings.

A revised edition of the earlier book, this volume contains many new material like facsimiles of the tributes of Mahatma Gandhi and Rabindranath Tagore. While we come across many oft-quoted utterances, we also find many lesser known statements like those by the scientist Satyendra Nath Bose and writer Munshi Premchand. Some thoughts are truly remarkable. The observation by Mahendranath Sircar is a case in point: 'Vivekananda was the spirit of selflessness incarnated in flesh' (113). The source of each utterance has been given and biographical sketches of the thinkers have been appended. A study of this book reveals interesting information, like the similarity of the constitutions of the Ramakrishna Mission and the UNESCO. This book will inspire many to know more about Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda and will be a handy reference for research scholars.

Swami Narasimhananda
Advaita Ashrama, Kolkata

REPORTS

Commemoration of the 175th Birth Anniversary of Sri Ramakrishna

The following centres celebrated the 175th birth anniversary of Sri Ramakrishna. **Jalpaiguri:** Discourses and bhajans at the ashrama on 23 and 24 March 2012. **Malda:** Discourses and bhajans at Koklamari village, about 30 km from the ashrama, on 30 April. **Nagpur:** A one-week programme comprising spiritual retreat, devotional singing, and other activities from 23 to 29 February. **Porbandar:** A six-day programme comprising discourses on Sri Ramakrishna, public meeting, spiritual retreat, and cultural programmes from 10 to 15 April. **Ramharipur:** Monks of the ashrama visited 175 villages in Bankura district at different times from November 2011 to April 2012. In all these places they conducted religious discourses and discussed with the villagers the ways and means for achieving all-round development of the villages.

Commemoration of the 150th Birth Anniversary of Swami Vivekananda

The following centres organized various programmes to commemorate the 150th birth anniversary of Swami Vivekananda. **Chandigarh:** Drama on the life of Swamiji at the ashrama on 2 April; lectures on Swamiji's life and teachings and guided meditation at Vidya Bharati Shodh Sansthan, Kurukshetra, on 21 April and at a government school in Panchkula district, Haryana, on 24 April—about 150 and 250 persons respectively attended the functions. **Chengalpattu:** Procession, discourses, cultural



Bharatiya Adhyatmika Sammilana at Mysore

programmes, and a film show on Swamiji at Neelamangalam village on 8 April. **Jalpaiguri:** Cultural competitions on 25 March, in which about 600 students took part. **Kadapa:** Four-day free residential training camp in agriculture and allied subjects for farmers from 3 to 6 April, attended by 33 persons from 4 districts of Rayalasima. **Limbdi:** Talks on Swamiji's life and message in four educational institutions from 27 March to 3 April, which were attended by about 3,200 students in all, and a nine-day Bal Bharati camp from 20 to 28 April, in which 80 students participated each day. **Mysore:** Bharatiya Adhyatmika Sammilana (spiritual congregation) from 20 to 23 April, in which about 230 monks and spiritual leaders of various Hindu denominations and groups, mostly from Karnataka, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, and

Bharatiya Adhyatmika Sammilana at Mysore



Tamil Nadu, took part—about 2,500 devotees attended the programme; release of a commemorative volume *Viveka Jagruthi* on 20 April; and processions of monks, delegates, and devotees on 21 and 22 April. Also on 22 April Sri D V Sadananda Gowda, chief minister of Karnataka, inaugurated Viveka Smaraka on the renovated erstwhile premises of Niranjana Math, where Swami Vivekananda had stayed during his visit to Mysore. On the occasion a public function was held on Mysore Palace grounds, in which Swami Prabhananda, General Secretary, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, presided over and the chief minister of Karnataka and several other dignitaries addressed the huge gathering of more than 15,000 people. There was also a felicitation of monks on 23 April and meetings on all the four days. **Narainpur:** A three-day regional tribal convention from 29 to 31 March, attended by about 2,500 persons, among whom there were 949 delegates from six states. Sri Shekhar Dutt, governor of Chhattisgarh, attended the programme on 30 March. **Patna:** A teachers' workshop on 8 April, attended by nearly 200 teachers from different schools and colleges and also by some professors and doctors from Patna University. **Ranchi Morabadi:** A ten-day programme from 22 April to 1 May, which included a three-day spiritual retreat, public meetings, discourses, devotional singing, and cultural programmes. **Shillong:** Public meetings addressed by the governor of Meghalaya Sri

R S Mooshahary, the deputy chief minister of Meghalaya Sri Bindoo M Lanong, and several other dignitaries on 27 April. **Swamiji's Ancestral House:** On the centre's initiative two institutions, one in Salt Lake and the other in north Kolkata, organized seminars on 17 and 27 April on the relevance of Swamiji's message in today's context. **Vijayawada:** Cultural competitions, in which about 36,000 students from various schools in Andhra Pradesh took part. **Vishakhapatnam:** Talks at 32 educational institutions in 3 districts of Andhra Pradesh from January to March.

New Mission Centre

Ramakrishna Ashrama, Kathmandu, Nepal, has been made a branch centre of the Ramakrishna Mission. Its contact details are as follows: Ramakrishna Ashrama, Ward No 2, Saraswoti Marg, Gairidhara, Kathmandu, Nepal; phones: +977 1 4004053 and +977 98511 44315; e-mail: ramakrishnaashramnepal@gmail.com

New centre in Nepal



News from Branch Centres

Sri Shekhar Dutt, governor of Chhattisgarh, visited **Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Chandigarh**, on 1 April and participated in its annual celebration.

Ramakrishna Math, Quilandy, conducted a summer camp from 8 to 12 April for children in the age group 10–13, in which 55 children took part. The programme included, among other activities, yoga exercises, narration of the lives and teachings of the Holy Trio and other saints, bhajans, and Vedic chanting.

Ramakrishna Mission Sevashrama, Lucknow, has set up a new cardiac OT unit comprising a five-bed cardiac surgery ITU and an operation theatre; it was inaugurated on 19 April by Sri Sudip Bandyopadhyay, union minister of state for Health and Family Welfare.


Swami Suhitananda, Assistant Secretary, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, laid the foundation stone for the proposed vocational training centre building at Vivekananda Cultural Centre in the premises of **Ramakrishna Mission, Shillong**, on 27 April.

Srimat Swami Atmasthanandaji Maharaj,

President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, inaugurated the newly set-up exhibition 'Sri Ramakrishna Divya Lila Pradarshani' at **Ramakrishna Math, Balaram Mandir**, on 29 April.

Relief

Distress Relief • The following centres distributed various items to needy people. **Guwahati**: 4 sewing machines and 4 weaving machines (*tatsals*); **Nagpur**: 77 saris, 8 dhotis, 25 pants, 40 T-shirts, tooth powder, soap, and other items.

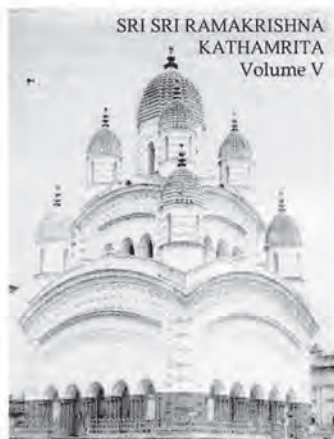
Flood Relief • Most of the areas at Western Viti Levu in Fiji were again struck by devastating floods towards the end of March 2012. **Nadi** centre restarted primary relief work in and around Nadi town, which is among the worst-hit areas with about 4 to 6 feet of standing water. The centre served nearly 1,500 cooked meals and distributed family grocery packs (each pack containing 5 kg rice, 2 kg peas, 2 kg flour, tea, oil, salt, and other items) and clothing to 470 affected families. About 7,700 lunch parcels and 4,250 exercise books were distributed among needy students. 

Distribution of grocery packs in Nadi



Distribution of exercise books in Nadi





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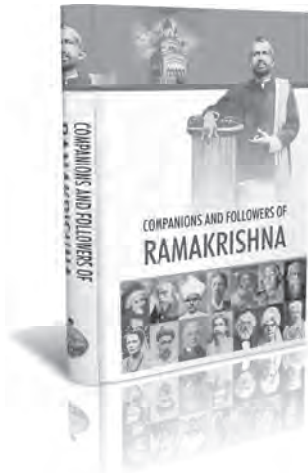
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Companions and Followers of Ramakrishna

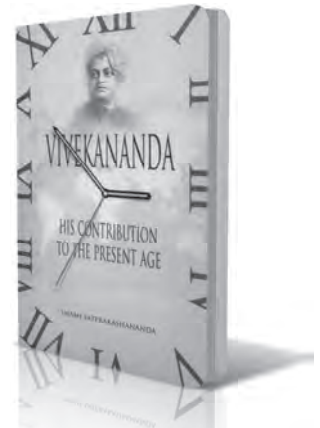


This book contains brief information about 1273 persons who were either companions or followers of Ramakrishna. Some of them do not categorically belong to these two groups and can be said to be mere acquaintances. Its importance lies in the fact that, along with the important ones it also keeps before us information about many a lesser known characters from Ramakrishna's life as well as about his later followers. Released on the occasion of the 175th birth anniversary of Sri Ramakrishna it will facilitate serious readers who want to know especially about the lesser-known characters which find mention in Ramakrishna's literature as well as tradition.

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APPEAL FOR RESTORATION

Ramakrishna Kutir at Almora, Uttarakhand, was founded at the behest of Swami Vivekananda by Srimat Swamis Turiyanandaji Maharaj and Shivanandaji Maharaj, celebrated monastic disciples of Sri Ramakrishna. Unprecedented rains and the cloud burst in September 2010 at Almora caused tremendous landslide, gorges, cracks, and land-sinking in the Ashrama. The changed land contour has damaged the temple and other buildings. Engineers have suggested abandoning an old building and rebuilding another inhabitable one.

This Ashrama is mainly a retreat centre where monks, devotees, and admirers of Sri Ramakrishna come, live in a spiritual atmosphere, and get peace of mind. This spirituality is still alive and vibrant. The effect of Swami Turiyanandaji's intense austerities here will remain for eternity. Apart from the continuous welfare activities for the poor people of the hill regions and needy students, this Ashrama conducted relief work by distributing 5000 woollen blankets to the victims of the said calamity and devastation in Almora district.

By the grace of Bhagawan Sri Ramakrishna and with the active cooperation of devotees and admirers of the Holy Trio, the restoration work of the land and building of the Ashrama has started since 8 April 2011. The work is in progress. We expect to complete the major restoration work of the land before rebuilding devastated houses depending on the availability of resources. We appeal to one and all to extend their helping hand to save the Ashrama. For the entire restoration and reconstruction work, we need more than ₹ 2 crore.

Cheque/Draft may please be drawn in favour of '*Ramakrishna Kutir, Almora*' and sent to: Ramakrishna Kutir, Bright End Corner, Almora, Uttarakhand 263 601. The name of the donors of ₹ 2 lakh and above will be displayed in a prominent place if they wish so. All donations are exempt from Income tax under section 80G of the Income Tax Act, 1961.

Swami Somadevananda
Adhyaksha



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